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Rush-weaving in Taiwan

Perceptions of the Environment and the Process of Becoming Heritage

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Abstract

This thesis is based on fieldwork carried out among weavers of rush-woven objects in rural Taiwan. In this thesis, I argue that nowadays rush-weaving is good work, though not good labour, for the weavers, and the social logic of Yuanli rush-weaving lies in the process of craft production. It is an ethnographic investigation into the practice of rush-weaving in association with colonialism, the heritage movement, and museum operation. Firstly, this thesis examines the economics and history and practice of craft production, in order to understand how the craft industry has become what it is and what is embedded in the process of production. The skill-based knowledge required of weavers is embedded in the relationship between a weaver and her environment. While this fundamental characteristic remains, new meanings and uses are attached to craft practice and the objects produced. Secondly, this thesis explores the process by which craft production is involved in the heritage and museum movement in contemporary Taiwan, so as to understand the interrelationship between craft production and the movement. I consider how ideas of tradition, heritage, and museums are perceived and enacted in everyday life, and find that these ideas contain contradictions and have different meanings for insiders and outsiders. The analysis as a whole seeks to explain why artisans keep weaving in contemporary society, and that it must be understood in terms of their continuous reaction to the constant transformation that the rush-weaving industry has undergone, which is reflected in the relationship between artisans and their objects in the process of production. The thesis addresses current issues – which are both fiercely contested in events and policies, and marginalised in everyday life – in Taiwan, but also attempts to contribute to the anthropological perspective on knowledge in practice, technology and social logics, past and present, and tradition and innovation.

Signed Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed entirely by me, the candidate, Yi-fang Chen. Unless otherwise stated or indicated, the work is all my own, and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed

Yi-fang Chen

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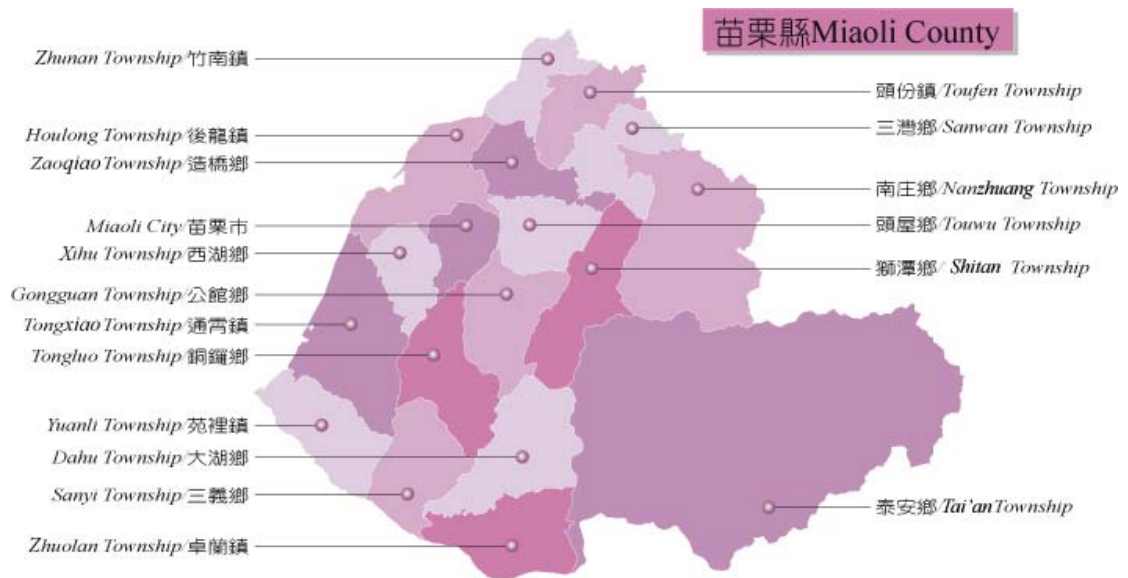
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Maps



1. Map of Taiwan showing Miaoli County (from www.surftrip.com/image/maps)



2. Map of Miaoli County showing Yuanli Township

(from: placesearch.moi.gov.tw/search/image/map/10005.jpg)



3. Map of Yuanli Township (publisher: Ministry of the Interior. 2006/02.)

Note on romanisation

Tongyong Pinyin and Tai Luo Pinyin are the romanisation systems used for the Taiwanese (Holo) and Mandarin terms in this thesis. The orthography of Taiwanese languages is a topic of much debate and no little controversy. In terms of Mandarin words, in addition to Tongyong Pinyin, there are other systems including Pinyin (Hanyu Pinyin) and Wade-Giles. I use Tongyong Pinyin in this thesis because it was the official system in Taiwan during the period of my fieldwork (2005-2006), despite the fact that the official system was changed from Tongyong Pinyin (used in 2002-2008) to Pinyin in 2009, due to a change in central government. A few exceptions to the use of Tongyong Pinyin are found, such as my rendering of the Kuomintang leader's name as Chiang Kai-shek, the conventional usage that follows neither the Pinyin nor the Wade-Giles system. In terms of Taiwanese Holo words, Tai Luo Pinyin is also the official system, which was planned in 2005 and initiated in 2006.

International Phonetic Alphabet	Tai Luo Pinyin	Tongyong Pinyin
/p/	p	b
/ph/	ph	p
/b/	b	bh
/m/	m	m
/t/	t	d
/th/	th	t
/n/	n	n
/l/	l	l
/k/	k	g
/kh/	kh	k
/g/	g	gh
/ŋ/	ng	ng
/h/	h	h
/ts/	ts	z
/tsh/	tsh	c
/s/	s	s
/dz/	j	r
/a/	a	a
/i/	i	i
/u/	u	u
/e/	e	e

Pinyin (Hanyu Pinyin)	Tongyong Pinyin
b	b
p	p
m	m
f	f
d	d
t	t
n	n
l	l
g	g
k	k
h	h
j	ji
q	ci
x	si
zh,zhi	jh,jhih
ch,chi	ch,chih
sh,shi	sh,shih
r,ri	r,rih
z,zi	z,zih
c,ci	c,cih
s,si	s,sih
-i	ih
an	an
en	en
ang	ang
eng	eng
er	er
yi,-i	yi,-i
wu,-u	wu,-u
yu,-ü	yu
a	a
o	o
e	e
ê	ê
ai	ai
ei	ei
ao	ao
ou	ou
ya,-ia	ya,-ia
	yo
ye,ie	ye,-ie
yai,-iai	yai,-iai
yao,-iao	yao,-iao
you,-iu	you,-iou

Pinyin (Hanyu Pinyin)	Tongyong Pinyin
yan,-ian	yan,-ian
yin,-in	yin-in
yang,-iang	yang,-iang
ying,ing	ying,-ing
wa,-ua	wa,-ua
wo,-uo	wo,-uo
wai,-uai	wai,-uai
wei,-uei	wei,-uei
wan,-uan	wan,-uan
wen,-un	wun,-un
wang,-uang	wang,-uang
weng,-ueng	wong,-ong
yue,-üe	yue
yuan,-üan	yuan
yun,-ün	yun
yong,-iong	yong

Introduction¹

Tan Bin-tat was a Yuanli resident in his sixties. He has never been involved in the rush-woven hat-and-mat business. However, living in Yuanli all of his life, he knew a good deal about the rush-weaving industry. When I first met him, I briefly told him about what I was doing in Yuanli. He responded in a very serious tone:

Think about the scene - an old woman who is already over eighty still sits on the ground, hunched over, and weaves objects. She has poor eyesight and can hardly see her objects, so she weaves just by touch and experience. And for her work, a mat of such a fine grain, she is paid less than one hundred dollars.² What is all her work for?

Chiong Chhiu-hiong used to be involved in the hat-and-mat business on a large scale in the 1960s and 1970s, but nowadays runs a dumpling shop with his family. He opened the restaurant during the last years of his hat-and-mat business, as he knew that the business would not last long. I visited their dumpling restaurant in the evening. Chiong Chhiu-hiong and his wife were in their sixties or seventies, and their son was middle-aged. During a lull in the restaurant's service, the family sat down and talked to me about their hat-and-mat business and their feelings about it. The first sentence that Chiong Chhiu-hiong said to me was, 'nowadays nobody is making rush-woven objects anymore, and you are going to make this your research topic?'

These two conversations astonished me. I was surprised not because I did not realise the reality of the contemporary rush-weaving business, but because they had summed up the situation so directly and succinctly, which I truly appreciated. Thus, throughout my fieldwork I was looking for the answers to both of these questions. Meanwhile, I had begun to understand that what lay behind the words of Tan Bin-tat and Chiong Chhiu-hiong was in fact the feeling of disappointment. This feeling was shared by the people of Yuanli in general. During the year that I lived with them, I met not one single person who wanted his or her son or daughter to pursue rush-

¹ Throughout this thesis, unless otherwise specified, I use the present tense to describe what people do on a day-to-day or regular basis, and to make my arguments and analyses, whereas I use past tense to describe what I observed when I was in the field but I think might change afterwards rather than remain the same statically.

² NT\$100 is about £2.

weaving as an occupation. However, this is just one side of the story.

Tan Ang-khi was a weaver and almost eighty years old. She made rush-weaving products as a subsistence activity. Even though she was already at the age when most people can retire, she still wove every day. She took up this occupation at the age of seven or eight, and has been engaged in this industry ever since. It became her lifelong job. When I watched her weaving, it was exactly the scene that Tan Bin-tat had described. Nevertheless, when I asked her when she intended to quit weaving, she smiled at me but did not respond. I believe she will keep weaving until the day she is unable to continue.

During my fieldwork, I regularly encountered curiosity and doubt from people, regarding my study of rush-weaving in Yuanli, similar to the sentiments expressed by Tan Bin-tat and the Chiong family. I also had many people say to me, 'I hope your thesis will not be the last piece of research on Yuanli rush-weaving, after which rush-weaving disappears in Yuanli'. On the one hand, Yuanli people had shown me their contradictory feelings towards rush-weaving, which I presumed proved that my study of rush-weaving was not entirely meaningless, and in fact revealed an important issue. On the other hand, like Tan Bin-tat and Chiong Chhiu-hiong, I also attempted to understand why these Yuanli artisans – like Tan Ang-khi – people who I worked with most frequently in the field, kept on weaving.

The focus of the thesis

The focus of this thesis is to understand the changing character of Yuanli rush-weaving as a livelihood through which people express themselves and interact with others in rural Taiwan, and to ask this question: what is the social logic of the contemporary practice of rush-weaving, as an activity chosen by Yuanli weavers? In this thesis, I argue that rush-weaving as a livelihood is embedded in the interrelationship between the weaver, the material of weaving, and their environment, and that the weaver's continuing commitment to the practice of weaving is made possible by her adaptation to the constant transformations in the rush-weaving

industry, the latest of which is predominantly related to heritage and museums.

This research is situated at the intersection of the following two phenomena: while the craft practice of rush-weaving and rush-woven products are fading out of Yuanli people's lives, they are increasingly a part of the agendas of the heritage and museum movement. This thesis explores the meaning of craft production in contemporary Taiwanese society, and examines the way in which ideas like 'tradition', 'heritage', and 'museums' are locally perceived and enacted (*c.f.* MacDonald 1997a; Venkatesan 2009b). Heritage and museums are usually discussed in relation to the state or nation (e.g. Kaplan 1994; Fladmark 2000; Fontein 2006), or they are examined from the perspective of being an institution. However, in this thesis, I consider the following question: what is the role of these ideas, and their subsequent institutions, in the everyday life of people, if any?

The material world: technology and materiality

This thesis attempts to answer the following question: what is the social logic of the continuing commitment by artisans to the making of rush-woven objects in contemporary Yuanli, when, as a practical activity, it appears to be 'illogical and outlandish' (Lemonnier 1993: 4)?

Anthropologists study objects and their relations to people, as they believe that the investigation and analyses of the material conditions of life should not be neglected because they are as fundamental in defining a society as religion or political ideas (see Bray 1986: xvi). The study of objects in anthropology used to be important before the 1930s, after which it was pretty much neglected, but has re-emerged since the 1980s (see Stocking 1985; Bouquet 2001). Since the renewed interest in material culture in the 1980s, anthropologists who study objects have had different concerns. The first group (e.g. Miller 1994, 1998a, 2005a; Tilley 1999, 2002, 2006), who more often than not identify themselves as belonging to the field of material culture studies, have been concerned with the meanings which are embedded in objects. What is really important to them is social relations, rather than objects (see Miller 1987,

1994). However, starting from a critical perspective of material culture studies, some scholars seek an artefact-oriented anthropology that is not about material culture (e.g. Henare 2003; Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007). Inspired by Marilyn Strathern (1990), their goal is to transcend any dualism between things and concepts. The idea is to see things as representing themselves, rather than assuming that they stand for something else.

Other scholars study the material world of technologies, and the relationship between people and their social, cultural and natural environment (e.g. Lemonnier 1992, 1993, 1996; Bray 1997, 2000; Ingold 2000, 2001). They investigate how objects are produced and why this process is crucial. Francesca Bray, in her study of Chinese women's production of textiles between A.D. 1000 and 1800, explores how technologies produce people and relations between people (1997). A technique, as she defines it, is an action performed on matter and meant to produce an object with human meaning. A technology is the technique exercised in its social context and specific to a society. Bray argues that 'the most important work that technologies do is to produce people: the makers are shaped by the making, and the users shaped by the using' (1997: 15-6).

It is the study of the third group of people that I found relevant to my research of Yuanli rush-weaving. My study of the practice of rush-weaving and rush-woven objects is concerned not so much with why some things matter (*c.f.* Miller 1998b; Tilley 2002), but instead intends to understand how the weavers are shaped by their practice of rush-weaving. Hence, I do not examine only objects, but look into persons, objects, and the relationship between the two, which are connected through the weaver's practice of weaving. In order to produce objects, people need techniques. Drawing on Pierre Lemonnier's notion of 'technological choice' (1993), I explore why Yuanli weavers choose to practice craft production and produce handmade objects in a world where mass consumption seems to permeate.

Pierre Lemonnier (1993) addresses the notion of 'technological choice' in order to explain why in many societies people's choices share the oddity of sometimes using

material procedures whose results seem absurdly negative from the viewpoint of the techniques in question. 'Technological choice' refers to the process of selecting technological features, either invented locally or borrowed from the outside. Lemonnier points out that people who chose relatively inefficient techniques were not unaware of the existence of more effective procedures. Hence, the apparently marginal examples give rise to an important set of theoretical questions concerning the way societies produce their intellectual and physical means of acting upon the material world. He suggests looking into the social content of techniques, because 'techniques are first and foremost social productions' (Lemonnier 1993: 2-3). What underlies and directs our actions on the material world are the mental processes, which are embedded in a broader, symbolic system. Thus, all techniques are simultaneously embedded in and partly a result of non-technical considerations. Societies choose from a whole range of possible technological avenues, and social logics underlie these choices. Lemonnier asserts that anthropology 'has a prominent role to play in the understanding of the processes of choice and their implications' (1993: 7).

This is where I found Lemonnier's argument thought-provoking in framing and understanding the contemporary practice of rush-weaving. Yuanli weavers do not live in an isolated village but in a world of diversity, where choices are available to them. In other words, they are not compelled to maintain or perpetuate the practice of rush-weaving. Thus, what is the social logic behind the choice to continue the practice of rush-weaving, by which products are entirely handcrafted? The situation with rush-weaving, I found, is similar to but also different from the agricultural practices in the wine-growing region in southern France. Because a proper wine-grower is one who is a good ploughman, which emphasises the social importance of ploughing, people carry on with the practice of ploughing vineyards to remove weeds, despite the available and commonplace use of chemical weedkillers (Guille-Escuret 1993).

In order to bring together the anthropologies of technology and of art, Tim Ingold (2000) examines the centrality of skilled practice. He argues that, neither innate nor

acquired, skills are grown, and incorporated into the human organism through practice and training in an environment. In the same volume he also looks into livelihood, focusing on the ways in which human beings relate to components of their environment in the activities of subsistence procurement.

The notion of materiality has been an important issue for anthropologists in recent years, especially since the publication of *Materiality* (Miller 2005b). As Daniel Miller makes it clear in the introduction, which begins with stating the two attempts to theorize materiality: a vulgar theory of mere things as artefacts, and a theory that claims to entirely transcend the dualism of subjects and objects. However, he does not define the notion of materiality straightforwardly, but suggests that ‘a volume that spans topics as diverse as cosmology and finance cannot afford to rest upon any simplistic definition of what we mean by the word *material*’. Rather, it needs ‘to encompass both colloquial and philosophical uses of this term’ (2005a: 3-4). Miller asserts that ‘what makes materiality so important is very often the systematic cultivation of immateriality. Humanity proceeds as though the most effective means to create value is that of immateriality’ (2005a: 28).

In the latest debates on ‘materiality’, Christopher Tilley (2007) argues that what really matters is the reason why certain kinds of objects and their properties become important to people. In other words, he considers the meaning and significance of an object. Tim Ingold (2007a, 2007b) disagrees with Miller (2005a, 2007) and Tilley. Instead of employing the notion of materiality, Ingold explores the properties of materials. For him, materiality is a vague term. His plea is to take materials seriously, since it is from them that everything is made. He reiterates the object’s involvement in its total surroundings.

This thesis is neither intended to explore the issue of the transcendence of subject and object, nor to encompass the philosophical uses of materiality. Rather, the thesis aims to understand the process of craft production and what is embedded in the process. Hence, I found Ingold’s notion of ‘qualities of the material’, rather than Miller’s idea of ‘materiality’, more helpful in understanding my study of rush-

weaving.

Francesca Bray has explored the notion of craft in the Chinese context, which she regards as being ‘cleverness in the practical skills of manipulating the environment’ (1997: 46-7). Ingold refers to skilled, technical artistry using the term craftsmanship. Taking the playing of a musical instrument for example, Ingold suggests that the opposition between player and instrument is ‘collapsed in the instant when the former begins actually to *play*. In that instant, the boundaries between the player, the instrument, and the acoustic environment appear to dissolve’ (Ingold 2000: 413-4, author’s emphasis).

By exploring the process of production, I find a mutual transformation between persons and things. Drawing on Tim Ingold’s notions of ‘the quality of the material’ and ‘skilled practice’, I argue that rush-weaving is a skilled practice closely related to the qualities of the material and therefore deeply embedded in the local environment. The material used in weaving is a plant with special characteristics. Because of its quality, the material is not passive but can act upon the weaver and effectively determine the way in which it is treated. Thus, the weaver’s production of rush-woven objects is a process of changing the qualities of the material and perceiving the changes in her environment. Meanwhile, her body and thoughts are shaped in the practice of weaving.³

For many, it is not production but consumption that is the issue in both the every day life of the individual and academic research. The study of consumption has been a topic of ongoing research since the 1970s (see Miller 1995). Daniel Miller studies mass consumption in contemporary society in order to investigate the relationship between material culture and society, and to assess the consequences of the enormous increase in industrial production over the last century (1987). However, I try to answer the same question from the opposite perspective. It is very true that now we are living in a world of mass consumption. Nevertheless, although craft production is less visible, it is not extinct. I suggest it is meaningful to explore the

³ Men are not excluded from or forbidden to take part in the weaving profession. However, all of the weavers I met, and who had taken weaving as their livelihood, were women.

reason why people, although a minority, keep practicing craft production in contemporary societies.

Above all, through the understanding of the practice of rush-weaving, this thesis attempts to capture the nuances of ‘the everyday technologies that shape material worlds’ (Bray 1997: 2). My study of rush-weaving has manifested what Francesca Bray argues, that ‘the technologies reveal not just the material dimensions of a mode of production, but the social and ideological world it underpins’ (1997: 15). A study as such is to ‘consider more realistically the meaning of technical choices, rather than reducing them to purely pragmatic considerations’, and therefore, Bray suggests, ‘we need to re-embed technologies in their social context to see what agendas they served’ (1997: 20-21).

Heritage and museums

I find that the practice of rush-weaving is, on the one hand deeply related to the environment, and on the other hand associated with the heritage and museum movement in contemporary Taiwan. In this thesis, I aim to find out how Yuanli people make a living and live their lives, and in so doing respond to constant external pressures, much of which come from the state. Particularly, I look into the process in which weavers deal with and react to change. My question is: whilst the notion of heritage and the operation of museums have increasingly become a part of contemporary life, how are heritage and museums actually enacted and how do people perceive them? In the context of Yuanli rush-weaving, while the establishment of a museum and the heritage movement may be launched by the state’s political project, they always have to be located and thereby become part of people’s everyday lives. Hence, I want to consider the role of heritage and the museum in the local context of Yuanli and in relation to the weaver’s practice of rush-weaving.

Craft has been employed in preserving the nation’s material heritage, connecting past to present and furthering the development agenda of the state in independent India

(Venkatesan 2009a: 83). Neither heritage nor the museum is new in the Euro-American context. However, since the 1970s, heritage and the museum have had different meanings and relations to people in a society. Heritage as a form of inheritance has a much longer lineage, whereas what is called 'heritage' today is more a product of self-conscious creation than a genetic bequeathal (Hoelscher 2006: 200). Heritage has frequently been distinguished from history (see Lowenthal 1998; MacDonald 2006a; Hoelscher 1998). While history is an inquiry into the past, heritage is a celebration of it. Heritage, by and large, clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes (Lowenthal 1998: xv).

If heritage is, by definition, a celebration of the past, the introduction of the notion of heritage to a society can potentially change the relationship between people and their pasts. Not every society would necessarily develop a 'heritage industry' (see Hewison 1987; Wright 1985), but every society reflects on the past. However, the past may not always be positive and continuity can become problematic. Sharon MacDonald, by using the notion of 'difficult heritage', explores how people's attitudes towards the Nazi past are changing in contemporary Nuremberg (2006a, 2006b, 2009). With the idea of 'unsettling heritage', she has shown that heritage can move away from settlement into a single frozen past, but allow different layers of the past to appear. In addition, heritage presents identity as it embraces the past as building blocks of identity (MacDonald 2006a). Therefore the past matters for people who share that past.

In my study of Yuanli rush-weaving, it is the government which employs the notion of heritage and, by way of celebrating the past, infuses pasts with present purpose. However, it is the Yuanli people who live their lives, in which rush-weaving, namely the 'heritage' of Taiwan, is rooted. Hence, the meaning of the past of rush-weaving is different for the government and for Yuanli people. In this case, I try to understand what the meaning of the past of rush-weaving might be for Yuanli people.

Jeanne Cannizzo suggests analysing the museum itself as an artefact, one which exists in a particular social milieu and historical period, in order to question what

museum collections really mean and what they represent (1991: 151). The role of museums was challenged by the heritage movement in the 1980s, and since then, museums are more than places where objects are curated and exhibited (Davis 1999: 14). The importance of museums lies in the fact that they serve to remind us who we are and what our place is in the world (Davis 1999: 24). The rise of the eco-museum in the 1970s and the heritage movement in the 1980s in France have made, notably, the local museums of peasant culture a focal point (Bouquet 2001:7-8; Segalen 2001). Not only in France, but, for example, in Portugal (Dias 2001) and the United States (Fuller 1992) people have also started to set up museums or make exhibitions of local culture and community, such as the Museu Nacional de Etnologia in Lisbon and the Ak-Chin Indian Community's ecomuseum. These local and community museums exhibit the culture and lives of the ordinary people. Ecomuseums serve to conserve and interpret the elements of the environment in order to establish the thread of continuity with the past and a sense of belonging (Davis 1999: 5). Ecomuseums are about places, places that are very special to the people who live there (1999: xiv). In addition, the museum can be very different when it is part of people's daily lives, rather than a sacred place to visit (c.f. MacDonald 2002; Bouquet 2001).

From 1897 to the present day, Yuanli rush-woven objects have changed from being commodities of a craft industry, heritage, to museum collections and a local emblem. Nowadays, the craft production of Yuanli rush-weaving is very much related to the notion of heritage and the operation of the museum. The newly established museum of rush-weaving has the characteristics of an ecomuseum, but is different from a museum – a sacred place to visit, as MacDonald and Bouquet suggest – and more like an ordinary place in terms of the way people use it. Rush-weaving is not a handcraft that is available everywhere, but is deeply embedded in the local environment. That is why the museum of Yuanli rush-weaving is not merely about the activity of weaving, but, more importantly, about the place where people live their lives.

This thesis, on the whole, attempts to consider the intersection of Yuanli rush-weaving, heritage and museums by investigating the social logic of rush-weaving.

Given that all these happenings in relation to heritage and museums have taken place, rush-weaving remains as an everyday livelihood for the weavers. This is why I can explore the situation by drawing on the notion of the social logic of rush-weaving.

Taiwanese anthropology and ethnography

I hope this thesis will contribute to the existing ethnographic literature on Taiwan. The first anthropologists who studied Taiwan were Japanese anthropologists. They visited Taiwan in the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Most of them focused on physical anthropology or archaeology, and were associated with the Tokyo Anthropological Society. In addition to anthropologists, Japanese ethnologists also studied Taiwan in the same period. Afterwards, western anthropologists conducted research on Taiwanese society, especially between the 1950s and 1970s. Among others, there was the religious study of the Stanford School (see Wolf 1974; Ahern 1981; Harrell 1986; Sutton 1990; Wolf 1992; Weller 1994). After 1945, Chinese anthropologists, who fled from China to Taiwan, did research on Taiwanese society. Since the 1950s, more and more Taiwanese anthropologists, who were trained in Japan, the United States, or Britain, have participated in the anthropological study of Taiwan.

The anthropological study of Taiwan is closely associated with the changing regimes in Taiwanese society. Because Taiwan was colonised by Japan, anthropologists and ethnologists conducted research on Taiwan before and during the colonial period. When the Kuomintang's Republic of China (hereafter ROC) represented China in the world (until 1971), anthropologists studied Taiwan to find China (i.e. Taiwan as the representative of China, access to which was denied) and saw Taiwanese culture as part of Chinese culture. Along with the development of democratisation and the indigenisation movement in Taiwanese society, Taiwan is studied as an area in its own right, and the studies can be compared with the research of other areas. I will illustrate these in the following sections.

A brief history of Taiwan

The chronology of changing ‘sovereignty’ in Taiwan can be summarised as follows (Chiu 1999: 93; Brown 2004)⁴:

1624-1662	Netherlands/Spain
1662-1683	Ming Jeng
1684-1895	Ching dynasty
1895-1945	Japan
1945-2000	Nationalist China
2000-2008	Taiwan (Democratic Progressive Party)
2008-present	Chinese Nationalist Party

1945-1987	Martial Law
1987-1996	Post-Martial Law (transitional period)
1996-present	Full electoral democracy

Table 1. Regimes in Taiwan

Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895. In 1894, Japan and Ching China went to war over Korea. Japan acquired Taiwan under the Shimonoseki Treaty in 1895 following its victory over Ching China in the first Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5 (Fujimura 1973, quoted in Tsu 1999: 198). Taiwan became the first addition to the Japanese overseas empire and was under Japanese rule for fifty years. Between 1895 and 1945, Taiwan was included in Japan’s empire building and colonial engineering (see Ts’ai 2009; see also Chapter One). After its defeat in the Second World War, Japan renounced its rights to its colonies in Taiwan and Korea.

Based on the Cairo Declaration of 1943, Taiwan was given to the ROC after the end of WWII. However, the Cairo Declaration did not create a legal procedure for passing Taiwan’s sovereignty from Japan to the ROC. The notion of ‘undetermined Taiwan sovereignty’ represented the legal view taken by the US government in 1950 in regard to the legal status of Taiwan, and it was linked to the later peace treaty with Japan – the San Francisco Peace Treaty signed in 1951 and the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty signed in 1952. Taiwan was initially to be governed by the United Nations,

⁴ I have added information, which is not available in the books, into the table.

but when the Korean War broke out, the US quickly decided to prevent Taiwan falling into the hands of the People's Republic of China (Huang 2006).

In 1945, without consulting the island's population, Taiwan was given to the ROC to be ruled by General Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*, hereafter KMT) (Simon 2005a: 58). After the takeover of China by the Communist Party, the KMT retreated to Taiwan. For all residents of Taiwan, Taiwan's transfer to Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China represented a change from one violent colonial regime to another (Chiu 1999). No meaningful 'de-colonisation' of any sort took place; instead, this was a classic case of re-colonisation. The KMT regime postured to distance itself from the Japanese, though in reality 'the colonial ruling apparatus was carefully kept intact and was completely taken over' by the military and the police (Chiu 1999: 97). In order to consolidate its rule, the KMT government massacred over 20 thousand people in the 'February 28th Incident' of 1947 (see Simon 2002) and imprisoned countless dissidents, including indigenous people, in the forty years of martial law that followed (Simon 2005a: 58). In the period of 'White Terror', i.e. the suppression of political dissidents under the period of martial law, it is estimated (as no accurate figure is available) that 200,000 people were involved and several thousands of people were killed. In sum, the KMT ruled Taiwan by way of political dominance and economic exploitation (Feuchtwang 1975, 2009).

Democratization started in the 1950s and matured in the 1980s. In 1986, the Democratic Progressive Party (*Minjindang*, hereafter DPP) was formed and inaugurated as the first opposition party in Taiwan to counter the KMT. In the party constitution, the DPP advocated that the future of Taiwan should be decided by its residents. In 1991, the DPP amended the party constitution and stood for Taiwanese independence, which was to be based on a referendum. In general, the DPP advocates social justice, democracy, and international recognition for Taiwan. In 1988, Li Deng-huei, who was the vice president when the president passed away, succeeded to the post and became the first ethnically Taiwanese president. He was elected as the president again, indirectly in 1990 and directly in 1996. Since 1996, Taiwanese people have been able to choose their own president through direct

election. In the twelve years as the president, Li made efforts to democratize the government and to decrease the concentration of government authority that was in the hands of the nationalist Chinese. In 2000, the DPP won the presidential election, and thereby replaced the KMT. Since then, the DPP started its nation-building project (see Chapter Four). In 2008, the KMT's nominee won the presidency, on a platform of better ties with the People's Republic of China (PRC) under a policy of 'mutual nondenial'.

Since the 1990s, Taiwan-China relations, or tensions between the two, have influenced the political and economic situation in Taiwanese society. Chinese leaders in Beijing regard Taiwan not as a nation but rather as a territory belonging to the PRC. China is placing new missiles on its side of the Taiwan Strait – according to Copper (2003), fifty a year. In 2009, it was estimated that there were at least 1000 missiles pointing at Taiwan. Meanwhile, Taiwan's fatal attraction to the China market continues to grow. Nowadays, there is an estimated 1.6 million Taiwanese businessmen running their businesses in China. In sum, China will pursue military force to achieve political and economic dominance over Taiwan (Friedman 2006). In 2005, China set up the 'Anti-Secession Law', which was aimed at Taiwan and made it 'illegal' to secede from China in the name of 'Taiwan independence'.

1947	28 th February – 228 Incident. 'White Terror' begins.
1949	Kuomintang army, defeated in the Chinese Civil War, flees in exile to Taiwan with two million refugees.
1971	The seat for 'China' at the United Nations Security Council is assumed by the PRC, in place of the ROC.
1979	The United States breaks relations with ROC after it established relations with PRC.
1979	Formosa Incident; the indigenisation movement is born.
1987	Martial Law is lifted.
1996	The first ethnically Taiwanese president is directly elected. ⁵
2000	The first time in Taiwan's history that an opposition party has won the presidential election.

Table 2. Significant events in Taiwan, since the end of the Japanese colonial period

⁵ This was not the first time that Li Deng-huei assumed the presidency, but it was in 1988 that he succeeded to the post.

Anthropological and ethnographic studies on Taiwan

For anglophone anthropologists, anthropology emerged in Taiwan in the 1950s. Before anglophone anthropologists came to study Taiwan, there was abundant Japanese ethnography, which was replaced by the research of European, American, and Chinese anthropologists (Gates and Ahern 1981: 1). The Japanese government, in 1896, sent researchers in the four fields of zoology, botany, geology and anthropology to study Taiwan. Investigations were conducted in order to aid the colonial administration. In ten years, the foundation of anthropological studies on Taiwan was laid (Chiu 1999: 95). On the one hand, investigations of the ‘old customs’ focused on those of Holo and Hakka Taiwanese.⁶ For instance, between 1901 and 1919, the ‘Provisional Commission for the Investigation of Taiwanese Old Customs’ (*Rinji Taiwan Kyukan Chosakai*) studied social, economic and legal issues crucial to the effective and long-term governance of Taiwan (Tsu 1999: 198). In addition to the official investigation, scholars conducted research on the social aspects of Taiwan, such as religion (e.g. Masuda 1935). On the other hand, in this period, anthropological study focused on Taiwan indigenous peoples (e.g. Kojima 1915; Taihoku Teikoku Daigaku Dozoku Jinruigaku Kenkyushitsu 1935; Mabuchi 1960). These studies differed considerably from the next stage, the focus of which was on the study of non-indigenous people, or ‘Chinese’ as they assumed, in Taiwan.

Between the 1950s and 1970s, the interest from anglophone anthropology was due to the fact that, for them, Taiwan was the only part of China accessible to Western social scientists (Gates and Ahern 1981: 1). In this period, Taiwan stood for China, politically and anthropologically (Harrell 1999: 211). Researchers came to Taiwan to look for, as they supposed, the characteristics of Chinese culture and society that they could not find anywhere else (Gates and Ahern 1981: 8; Harrell 1999: 236). That is, the ‘seeing China in Taiwan’ syndrome (Tremlett 2009: 7, 12; see also Sangren 1987; Murray and Hong 1994, 2005; Harrell 1999). However, they overlooked the

⁶ Holo and Hakka are the names of groups of people and their languages. Their ancestors came from different regions of China and migrated to Taiwan between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

complexity of various cross-cultural encounters, which came from the influence of several foreign regimes over Taiwan, especially the Japanese colonial administration. Research topics focused on political organisation, local organisation, economic organisation, ethnicity, the family, and religion and ritual (e.g. Gallin 1966; Diamond 1969; Wolf 1968; Ahern and Gates 1981). Among others, research on the issue of women and work in rural villages was of much concern (e.g. Wolf 1972; Kung 1981).

Anthropological studies of Taiwan after the 1950s were also conducted by, apart from anglophone anthropologists, a handful of ethnologists who fled China with the KMT (Chiu 1999: 97). In the beginning, research focused on Taiwan indigenous society, which was treated as isolated and stagnated (e.g. Wei 1951, quoted in Chiu 1999). At the time, the research topics of anthropological studies were on material civilisation, social organisation, population change, and cultural contact (Chiu 1999: 100). Later on, the field of indigenous studies shrank. These Chinese ethnologists, as well as some Taiwanese ethnologists who shared the same perspective, much like the anglophone anthropologists, studied the non-indigenous people of Taiwan as 'laboratories' for the study of Chinese society and culture (e.g. Chen 1966). Nevertheless, later on some of these anthropologists started to examine the social, economic, political, and ethnic issues in Taiwanese society (e.g. Huang 1972, 1978, 1980; Hu 1984, 1989).

Between the end of 1978 and the early 1980s, Western social scientists started to be permitted to conduct research in rural China; by about 1986 the gates were wide open (Harrell 1999: 211, 225). Many scholars, if not all, left Taiwan for China to conduct their research. Since then, researchers were free to draw connections where they saw them, but not to assume them in advance (Harrell 1999: 225), that is, Taiwan's *representiveness* of China.

Since the 1990s, research has been conducted under the category of Taiwan studies (e.g. Murray and Hong 1994, 2005; Feuchtwang 1999; Harrell 1999; Shih, Thompson and Tremlett 2009), with some research themes continuing, such as religion (e.g. Feuchtwang 2007; Dell'Orto 2002). In addition, along with the social

and political changes in Taiwanese society, scholars became very interested in topics including ethnicity (e.g. Chun 1996, 2007; Brown 1996), politics (e.g. Fell 2005, 2006, 2008), identity (e.g. Corcuff 2002, 2004; Simon 2003a; Brown 2004), and nation (e.g. Lu 2002; Simon 2005b). Many researchers conducted research on women and gender issues, taking changes in society into consideration (e.g. Lee 2004; Farris, Lee and Rubinstein 2004; Lan 2006; Simon 2003b). Furthermore, some researchers conducted comparative studies between Taiwan and China (e.g. Stafford 2004a, 2004b; Feuchtwang 2001, 2009). More recently, an edited volume entitled *Rewriting Culture in Taiwan* (Shih, Thompson and Tremlett 2009) was published. The aim of the papers collected in the book is to show that, 'the study of Taiwan shifts from being a provincial backwater of sinology to an area not so much in its own (sovereign) right, but as an aid to en-framing a range of issues and questions' (Tremlett 2009: 2). At the end of the book, Feuchtwang suggests that, '[w]hat makes Taiwan a case of special interest is the particularly uncertain future of its nationality'. It is 'Taiwan's peculiarly urgent, strong, and vulnerable uncertainty' (2009: 205, 208). He reiterates,

Located, particular, attractive to or adaptively amenable to many more than one recognition of worth, historically specific but unpredictable – this is what a reading of Taiwanese cultural, social, and for that matter political production offers. But read back into the cultural politics of Taiwan it is agonizing, a perpetual uncertainty (Feuchtwang 2009: 207).

My research of Taiwanese society is an attempt to contribute to the context that Feuchtwang illustrates. What I intend to do in this thesis is, as Harrell suggests, '[w]e need to begin with Taiwan, describe what happens there, and then, [...] look for similarities to other places [...] as well as differences with these same places' (1999: 235). As Harrell puts it, between the 1950s and 1970s 'we came to Taiwan to find China; now we are free to come to Taiwan to find Taiwan' (1999: 236).

Taiwanese society: some characteristics

Taiwan is located in the Western Pacific, just east of the south-central coast of China. Approximately 394 kilometres (245 miles) long and 144 kilometres (89 miles) wide at the centre, the surface area of the island of Taiwan is 36,000 square kilometres

(14,400 square miles), which is about the size of Holland. The island of Taiwan is surrounded by more than a dozen smaller islands and islets considered geologically linked to it (Copper 2003: 2). The population of Taiwan between 2005 and 2006 (the period of my fieldwork) was about 22,800,000. Taiwan's climate is subtropical; the very southern tip of the island is tropical. Summers are hot, humid, and long, extending from April to October; winters are short and mild, lasting from December to February. The average daytime peak temperature on the island is 21 degrees Centigrade (Copper 2003: 6). Taiwan has abundant rainfall all year round. Farmers produce a variety of crops, although rice is the staple.

Gates and Ahern make clear that Taiwan is 'a small, rapidly changing society with the densest population in the world, a quarter of its labour force employed in industry' (1981: 7). In three decades, from the 1950s to 1980s, Taiwan transformed from an agricultural society, to an industrial, and then finally to a post-industrial one. During the colonial regime, the policy was 'agricultural Taiwan, industrial Japan'. Under the KMT regime, the economic policy was that agriculture supported the development of industry. The share of agriculture in GDP changed from over 30% in the 1950s to less than 2% in the 2000s. Since 1962 GDP from industry has been higher than GDP from agriculture. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, the industrial transference started to be actively pursued. Gradually Taiwan is facing the problems and phenomena of a post-industrial society.

Industrialisation and urbanisation have gone hand in hand in Taiwanese society. People from rural places find jobs in urban places, and most of them stay and live their lives there. Although Taiwan is a small country, the difference between urban and rural areas can be enormous. For instance, the highest population density is over 41 thousand and the lowest is five persons per square kilometre.

Nevertheless, the development of transportation has reduced the relative distance between rural and urban areas. For instance, the Taiwan High Speed Rail (THSR) service was open to traffic in 2007. It has a top speed of 300 kph, and thus it takes only 90 minutes between the most northern city Taipei and the most southern city

Kaohsiung. The same distance takes five hours by express train. Because of the THSR, the western part of Taiwan has become open to daily commute. Some scholars suggest that western Taiwan is like a metropolis (see Liou 2003). Also, the development of transportation has made the communication between rural and urban places more convenient. For example, the establishment of the new motorway and its interchanges has made it easier for rural people to go to other places, for various reasons including visiting friends and relatives, business trips, tourism, and migration. However, despite the development of transportation, the boundary between the urban and rural areas still exists and the differences are still really obvious, and in some respects the boundary has become even more distinct due to the rapid development taking place in urban areas whilst rural areas may be slow to see changes. More importantly, many rural areas still do not have a motorway interchange and are not close to a THSR station. So, in actual fact the gap between rural and urban places may have become wider.

Hence, the rural-urban dichotomy is still valid. Further to this, by distinguishing what the rural area is, I can explore the way in which rural people live their lives. According to the United Nations' definition, the relationship between population density and urbanisation should be considered in the context of each country. In terms of this definition of urbanisation in Taiwan, according to Liou's research (1991), in 1922 an urban area was a place where the population was above 50 thousand, and this increased to above 100 thousand in 1970. She also considers a place where the agricultural population is below 40% to be an urban area. In addition, according to The Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS) of Executive Yuan, Taiwan, an urban area is a place where the population is above 20 thousand and the population density is above three hundred persons per square kilometre.

The question of whether Yuanli, the place where I studied, is a rural or urban town is somewhat less clear-cut. The population is 49,329 and population density is 723 persons per square kilometre (in 2004). In Liou's definition, Yuanli is not an urban area, whereas according to DGBAS's definition, it is. Although, according to

DGBAS's definition Yuanli is definitely an urban area, I suggest that relatively speaking it is a rural town in Taiwan. The reason is that half of the land is cultivated land, and 47 percent of the population in 2004 were farmers. Moreover, it is the most important area for rice plantations in the Miaoli County, which accounts for 26.5 percent of the harvest of the county. These issues will be addressed in detail below.

It is not my concern to define what a suitable unit of study is (*c.f.* Strathern 1982; Cohen 1985; Auge 1995, 1998); rather, I merely want to explain why it is still meaningful to study rural places in contemporary Taiwan. The difference between rural and urban still exists and therefore the distinction is necessary. More importantly, the development of the rural area is more often than not influenced by the development of the urban. For example, urban people treat rural places and villagers' ways of living as objects to consume in domestic tourism. Also, people who live in the city, to a large extent, decide the way in which the rural area is developed, according to their limited understanding. Moreover, modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation altogether challenge the way of living in rural villages. But it is evident that this goal is not shared by everyone. Over the past decade in particular, the younger generation have tended to return to their rural hometowns in order to make a living. This situation is very different from the past, where almost all young people chose to find a job in urban factories or companies. In sum, the rural village is still an important locus of everyday life.

I have presented the context in which Taiwan is considered to be a rapidly changing society. My concern is to point out that, despite such rapid transformation in Taiwanese society, Yuanli rush-weaving remains the livelihood of a number of people. I want to understand what lies behind the fact that these people still choose to participate in rush-weaving as a way of living.

Researchers have pointed out that Taiwan is a society of contested identities (e.g. Corcuff 2002; Lu 2002). Indeed, Taiwan is a country of complicated ethnic relations. Since the 1990s, the division into four ethnic groups is the way in which most people understand the ethnic relations in contemporary Taiwan. The four groups are: the

indigenous people, Holo Taiwanese, Hakka Taiwanese, and (Chinese) mainlander. Generally speaking, Holo and Hakka people refers to those whose ancestors came from *Fujian* and *Guangdong* in China and migrated to Taiwan before 1895, after which the Japanese colonial authority suspended further immigration from China. The Japanese colonial authority, under the category of ‘race’, made distinctions between Holo and Hakka, which were based on the ‘regional’ varieties of Han and mutually unintelligible ‘dialects’ and some significantly different customs, and as a result classified them depending on their province of ancestral origin (Brown 2004: 8-9).

Mountain indigenous people (Austronesian peoples)	There are fourteen officially recognised peoples who make up in total about two percent of the population.
Plain indigenous people (Austronesian peoples)	There are ten peoples according to the research. The plain indigenous people and Holo/Hakka people have intermarried and therefore it is difficult to distinguish between them now.
Holo and Hakka people (people whose ancestors immigrated from southeast China between the 17 th and 19 th centuries and intermarried with indigenous people)	The main population of Taiwan consists of this group of people – Holo people about 73 percent and Hakka people about 12 percent. Holo and Hakka people speak different languages; both of their ancestors were immigrants/settlers for economic reasons. ‘Taiwanese’ is now the term generally used to indicate this group of people (including both the Holo and Hakka people); sometimes the term is used only to refer to only Holo people. ‘Taiwanese language’ is the term used to indicate only the Holo language, and is spoken by perhaps 70 percent of the population in Taiwan.
Mainlanders (immigrants from China during 1945-1950 and their offspring)	People from this group include those Chinese (who came from different provinces of China with the KMT) and their children and grandchildren (who have been raised or were born in Taiwan). They were immigrants/refugees for political reasons. Mandarin is their common language, and this became the official language under the KMT regime. Now they represent about 13 percent of the population.

Table 3. The four ethnic groups of Taiwan

The term ‘Taiwanese’ is problematic. Some people believe it refers to all of those who identify with Taiwan, whereas others insist it refers only to Holo and Hakka people. In terms of inter-ethnic relationships, the situation has transformed from the

polarisation and opposition of Taiwanese (*benshengren*, literally people of the province/Taiwan) and Chinese (*waishengren*, literally people of other provinces) between the 1950s and the 1980s, to the diversity (including four major ethnic groups and Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Chinese spouses) since the 1990s.⁷ I suggest that it is necessary to distinguish between ethnic and national identity, which sometimes overlap but usually differ from each other. The tension between ethnic groups within Taiwan is usually caused by its connection to national identity (Taiwanese identity or Chinese identity), which is very often manipulated by politicians and media. Nonetheless, in the fierce discussion of ethnic or national identity, the indigenous peoples are still marginalised and often neglected in various aspects of social life.⁸

In terms of language, Mandarin is the official language, whereas the majority of people speak the Holo language. Until the 1990s, the language taught in schools was Mandarin. However, since then students are now able to learn their mother tongue (including indigenous languages, Holo, and Hakka) at school, along with Mandarin. The elderly Holo people, apart from speaking Holo language, usually cannot speak Mandarin, but speak Japanese, the language in which they were educated. While most people can speak Holo and Mandarin, only a few people can speak Hakka, not to mention the languages of the indigenous people. The younger generations of indigenous people can speak much less of their own language than their grandparents. Holo and Hakka are ‘mutually unintelligible’ (Brown 2004: 8); however, in places where the living areas of Holo and Hakka people adjoin or even mix, people tend to speak more of the other’s language. Generally speaking, there are certain areas where only the minority of indigenous people, Hakka, and (Chinese) mainlanders inhabit. However, both migration inside the country and intermarriage between the ethnic groups have made the boundaries between them less concrete.

‘Han Chinese’ is the term used by many scholars (especially those who treat Taiwanese studies as a part of Chinese studies, e.g. Tsu 1999) in referring to that

⁷ KMT’s ROC regards Taiwan as one of the 35 provinces, which is the way that it defines its territory in the constitution.

⁸ Yuanli people, i.e. people who I worked with in the field, are comprised of Holo and Hakka people.

which I call ‘Holo and Hakka Taiwanese’. I agree with Mi-cha Wu’s argument of the connotation of the ‘Han Chinese’. Wu (2006: 164) argues that it is a term mostly based on *jus sanguinis* (i.e. right of blood) and is used mainly by (Chinese) intellectuals, in order to distinguish themselves from Japanese people and Taiwanese indigenous people. By employing this term, it implies that there is a sense of connection or solidarity between Han people in Taiwan and China. In other words, ‘Han Chinese’ is a term with a particular ideology and strong political connotation that I do not agree with, and therefore in this thesis I choose not to use this term to refer to ‘Holo and Hakka Taiwanese’.⁹

The question of the extent to which Taiwanese-ness and Chinese-ness are different from each other is complicated. As Allen Chun suggests, ‘Chinese-ness in terms of material culture, ethnicity, or residence was never clearly defined’ (1996: 114). He argues that the notion of ‘Chinese-ness’ indeed ‘suffers less from its intrinsic “absence” than from the presence of too many discourses, internal as well as external’ (Chun 1996: 131). In addition, Melissa Brown suggests, by drawing on Tu-Wei-ming’s argument, that:

in defining Chinese-ness as a Han identity, the ‘periphery’ – that is, Han areas outside of China such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and overseas Chinese communities in places like Bangkok and San Francisco – has been more important, because it is more Confucian than the PRC’ (Brown 2004: 29).

Stephane Corcuff suggests that Taiwan is indeed ‘a laboratory of identities’ (2002). However, over the last two decades there have been an increasing number of people who regard themselves as ‘Taiwanese’ (over fifty percent) rather than ‘Chinese’. Stephan Feuchtwang has nicely described the current situation of Taiwanese society, which is, in his term, ‘the peculiarity and novelty of Taiwan’s politics of identity’:

In Taiwan there is the fervour of a new quest for nationality, a disputed narrative, and a state that has no already established nationality. The state of Taiwan under its various governments and their claims to a distinct political identity is instead constantly manoeuvring against the might of an old empire-nation that addresses Taiwan as part of its own self-identification (Feuchtwang 2009: 200).

I suggest that the period of the 1980s and 1990s is a critical phase in terms of the

⁹ I think this discussion about ‘Han Chinese’ is of interest predominately in academia rather than in everyday life. For instance, people who I worked with in the field would not use this term in their everyday conversations.

development of Taiwan's politics of identity, because of the *bentuhua* movement. The trend toward *bentuhua* (indigenisation) is regarded as the single most important aspect of cultural and political change in Taiwan over the past quarter of a century. It has functioned as a type of nationalism championing the legitimacy of distinct Taiwanese identity and has contributed to related constructs such as Taiwanese consciousness, Taiwanese identity, Taiwanese subjectivity, cultural subjectivity, national culture, and Taiwanese independence consciousness (Makeham and Hsiau 2005). 'Among the first things that the Chinese government did after taking over Taiwan was first to "de-Japanize" and then to "Sinicize" Taiwanese culture.' (Wang 2005: 55) 'Demands for the indigenisation of cultural policies emerged along with the rise of political movements that demanded democratic reforms in the late 1970s and early 1980s' (Wang 2005: 55). In contemporary Taiwan, cultural, ethnic and national identities are constantly contested, entangled, and sometimes controversial issues.

Methodological concerns

In this section I will show what kind of place my fieldsite was, how people lived their lives there, why my apprenticeship in rush-weaving became the most important method of study in my fieldwork, who I worked with, and what kind of craft objects I studied.

Yuanli Township is situated along the west-central coast of Taiwan. Sediments from two rivers, Taan River in the south and Yuanli River in the north, have contributed to the formation of the alluvial plain, which is ideal for agricultural practice. In particular, the good quality water of the Taan River improves the rice quality. The town is 68 square kilometres, about half of which is cultivated land. Rice is the main crop, and paddy fields made up 78 percent of the cultivated lands (Miaoli County Government 2004). The other crops included shaddocks, taros, rush, bitter melons, bamboo shoots, and oranges and citrus. The average temperature is between 20 and 25 Celsius, annual average rainfall between 1600 and 1800 millimetres, and the rainy season is from May to September.

The population is about 50 thousand, the male and female population roughly equal. There were three to four people in each household on average. About 35 percent (i.e. 4423 households) were farm households, and 47 percent of the population were farmers (Miaoli County Government 2004). In other words, about half of the Yuanli residents made their living from farming. Yuanli town is rectangular in shape, gently sloping downwards from southeast to northwest. Although it is a small town, it has diverse geographical characteristics – hills to the west and wetlands to the east by the sea, the Taiwan Strait. There are fishing villages at the west end of the town and the fisher households numbered 458 (Miaoli County Government 2004), while people living in the hill areas grow shaddocks and oranges. The Yuanli people call the eastern and hill side of the town the ‘inner area’, whereas the western and coastal side is called the ‘outer area’. The only railway station and the town centre are situated in the outer area, while the interchange of a newly built motorway (in service since 2003) is located in the inner area.

Between 2005 and 2006, when I was living in Yuanli, about 200 women, out of approximately 25,000 women (i.e. the total number of women in Yuanli), made their living by rush-weaving. In other words, between eight and nine out of 1,000 women made rush-woven objects for sale on a daily basis. These women may belong to two hundred different households, and as I described earlier in each household there were three to four persons. Consequently, it is fair to say that a minimum of 800 residents lived their lives in close relation to rush-weaving, and this figure does not involve merchants, dealers, and processors, who are also practitioners in the rush-weaving industry and thus made their living related to rush-weaving.

Yuanli has a famous neighbouring town named Dajia, which is a township to the south of Yuanli. Dajia and Yuanli have a long-term relationship involving the production and selling of rush-woven objects. The population of Dajia Township is more than Yuanli and stands at about 80,000. Since the late nineteenth century Dajia became a collection and distribution centre for rush-woven products, possessing a more developed commercial and communications infrastructure, as well as a larger

population. Therefore, a number of rush-woven products were named after the place where they were sold, for example 'Dajia mat' or 'Dajia hat'. These products were produced by women living in several neighbouring towns to the north and south of Dajia, including Yuanli. In Dajia, especially outside the town centre, there were weavers too, even though the number of weavers was much fewer than the number of Yuanli weavers. Hence, the success of the rush-weaving industry was based on the cooperation of all these towns. However, the situation has since changed, and the relationship between Yuanli and Dajia has altered from the cooperation of the past to competition in the present. In the past, as long as the products were sold, it was good for both the makers and sellers. In recent years, selling has become different: customers do not always purchase rush-woven products from nearby shops, but prefer to visit the places of production instead. Therefore, places need to promote themselves in order to attract tourists. As a result of this, Yuanli people have enthusiastically promoted Yuanli as the place where rush-woven products are made, while Dajia is where they are sold. In other words, Yuanli is the original place of production for rush-woven objects (see Chapter Four).

I first went to Yuanli in 1999. It was a preliminary trip, in which I investigated whether I could study Yuanli rush-weaving craft and industry for my MA degree. I took an ordinary train from Taipei city, my hometown, to Yuanli, which took about two and a half hours. Between 1999 and 2000, I did research in Yuanli for my MA thesis. At the beginning I knew none of the Yuanli people. I started the research with my own investigation, driving a car or walking in the streets in order to trace any clue that, I supposed, might lead me to the rush-weaving industry. For instance, by chance I came across farmers who were harvesting in the rush fields and happened to find the only rush shop in town. Later on, through people's introductions, I finally reached weavers as well as other practitioners of the industry. When I was writing up my MA thesis, in 2000, I was invited to join a committee organised by the Yuanli Township Office. The committee, which mainly consisted of professors from universities, was responsible for writing the local history of Yuanli town. Between 2000 and 2002, I conducted further research and wrote a piece called the 'Chapter of Culture' in the *History of Yuanli Township* (Yuanli Jhengjih bianzuanweiyuanhui

2002), which was published in 2002 by the Yuanli Township Office.

What happened in Yuanli in relation to rush-weaving after 2004 was the crucial factor that motivated me to conduct further research in the same place. In July 2004, a local museum of rush-weaving named the ‘Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall’ (hereafter TREH) was established in Shanjiao Village, which is the centre of the inner area of Yuanli. It was hardly surprising or exciting news to many Yuanli people. First of all, rather than being a new organisation, it includes a pre-existing, smaller exhibition hall, and both are operated by the same organisation, the Yuanli Farmers’ Association. Besides, the establishment of such a museum does not necessarily bring any change to local society. For me, though, it seemed to be a turning point and the beginning of substantial change. Before, the rush-weaving industry had faced extinction, whereas afterwards the potential for it to survive seemed to be visible, and the revitalisation of the industry expected by most. In addition, it is the first time that a museum dedicated entirely to rush-weaving has been created, that is, having regular staff members, fixed opening hours and even a museum shop. Taking all of this into consideration I think things are going to be different compared to the earlier situation.

I conducted fieldwork for my PhD research between November 2005 and October 2006. Throughout the twelve months of my fieldwork I lived in a place named *Rihnan*. Choosing a place to live, both in terms of the location and a specific flat/house, is never an easy thing. For a couple of months at the beginning of my fieldwork, I had been puzzling over the problem – what should be the scale, i.e. the geographical boundary, of my research? As I wished to focus on the weavers and their production of rush-woven objects, my research area had the potential to vary from the smallest unit, e.g. Shanjiao Village, to the whole of Yuanli Town, to the several coastal towns where weavers were making rush-woven products. When I made my decision, *Rihnan* seemed the best choice. It is situated exactly in between Yuanli and Dajia, though belonging to Dajia Township, and thus an ideal location for me to observe both a commercial centre and a production centre of rush-woven objects. Fortunately, I was able to rent a room from my landlady, who I knew from

taking part in the writing of the *History of Yuanli Township*. Her natal family is in Yuanli. At the time when we met, she was an employee of the Yuanli Township Council and recruited by the Yuanli Township Office to work with the committee. When I lived with her, she also kindly lent me her motorcycle, which enabled me to commute from *Rihnan* to Yuanli, or sometimes to Dajia. For instance, it was seven kilometres between my landlady's house and Shanjiao Village, and it only took me fifteen minutes travelling by motorcycle.

When I started my fieldwork, I did not immediately visit the people I knew, but instead sought out places that were new to me. This was because these places, which were the TREH and the rush-weaving workroom of the Shanjiao Community Association (hereafter the community workroom), seemed to represent the most successful, ongoing development of rush-weaving. Moreover, the work of individual weavers at home was, for the most part, inaccessible to an outsider like me, whereas institutions made production 'visible'. In addition, institutions were more accessible than people's homes, although I still had to obtain their permission in order to participate and observe. Coincidentally, both organisations were situated in Shanjiao Village. I started my fieldwork with these organisations, and they led me to the following places and people. To my surprise, the people who I worked with in 1999-2000 and 2005-2006 were entirely different groups of people. Previously I had for the most part interviewed people living in the 'outer area'; this time my everyday life focused on, though was not limited to, the 'inner area'. I did not find any difference in weaving between weavers from the outer and inner area, but it was the geographical distance and thereby the social network, that determined the weaver's interaction with the organisations.

Although I started my fieldwork within these organisations, I did not intend to dedicate my whole time to them. First of all, I was aware that rush-weaving no longer constituted a principal source of livelihood, so I wanted to find out how most Yuanli people made their living. I also wanted to understand how rush-weaving related to both weavers' and non-weavers' lives in a broader context. Secondly, I was aware that watching a weaver making objects would be entirely different to actually

experiencing the practice of weaving. In order to explore the relationship between the weaver and the object, it was logical to suppose that an apprenticeship in rush-weaving would offer the most effective means of research. In terms of the type of apprenticeship, the difference between being the apprentice of an individual weaver working at home and learning in an organisation is huge. I needed to practise both, although I believed that the former context would ultimately lead me to the essential character of rush-weaving. However, when I visited a senior weaver, through the introduction of a friend, and asked whether I could serve an apprenticeship with her, I was told, ‘come back to learn with me when you are able to distinguish each and every piece of rush and to follow the most basic techniques of “one over one” and “one over two”.’ The organisations, therefore, offered the ideal opportunity for me to get my apprenticeship started and to make contact with more weavers.

Apprenticeship as a methodological tool was evident throughout my fieldwork. The most important aspect of my fieldwork was my apprenticeship in rush-weaving. When I was conducting fieldwork, I frequently felt that I was at the same time an apprentice of anthropology and of rush-weaving, reflecting, as Edward Simpson puts it, ‘the parallels between anthropological fieldwork and apprenticeship’ (2006: 151). In fact, apprenticeship became the primary method of my fieldwork because my study of rush-weaving and weavers is related to their skill-based knowledge and bodily practice (c.f. Portisch 2007; Harris 2007; Herzfeld 2007; Dilley 2007, 2009; Kresse and Marchand 2009; Marchand 2007, 2009a, 2009b).

Apprenticeship, as Coy defines it,

is the means of imparting specialized knowledge to a new generation of practitioners. It is the rite of passage that transforms novices into experts. It is a means of learning things that cannot be easily communicated by conventional means. Apprenticeship is employed where there is implicit knowledge to be acquired through long-term observation and experience. This knowledge relates not to only to the physical skills associated with a craft, but also to the means of structuring economic and social relationships between oneself and other practitioners, between oneself and one’s clients. (Coy 1989a: xi-xii)

In other words, apprenticeship is associated with ‘specializations that contain some element that cannot be communicated, but can only be experienced’ (Coy 1989b: 2). Simpson further illustrates that apprenticeship ‘involves disciplining bodies and

minds and inculcating a set of dispositions towards tradition, religion, and politics, which simultaneously reproduces patterns of capital and creates a dependent constituency for the master' (2006: 153). By apprenticeship I refer to the period before an apprentice of rush-weaving can employ the knowledge and skill that she learns and thereby make objects for sale.

As I intended to understand how a weaver is shaped by the practice of weaving and the kind of relationship between person and object embedded in the object produced, apprenticeship as a method, and my subjective experiences as an apprentice, became indispensable. Like the authors of *Apprenticeship* (Coy 1989c), I became an apprentice in order to 'better understand the specialized occupations that are accessed through apprenticeship' (Coy 1989a: xii). It is through the apprenticeship that 'gradually, apprentices are transformed internally from novice to habitué as habit becomes habitude' and 'apprentices learn to become different kinds of people and to tread the delicate path of maturity' (Simpson 2006: 169). 'Learning is by doing' (Coy 1989b: 2; Stafford 2004: 4), which lies at the heart of the practice of rush-weaving and my study of it, as 'the production of goods and the production of knowledge are tied together' (Lucas 2002: 14, cited in Stafford 2004a: 4).

I had three phases of apprenticeship in total, and each phase turned out to be crucial and helpful to me. First of all, in the first three months, from November 2005 to January 2006, I worked with makers of rush-woven objects in the community workroom and learned the basic techniques of weaving for the first time. Secondly, with a basic knowledge and skill of weaving, I was allowed to join the training classes held by the Shanjiao Community Association in July and August, which were held in the community centre. In the classes, the teacher as well as weavers who were trainees taught me advanced techniques of weaving. Later on, I also joined the training classes held by the TREH and learned with many weavers. Finally in August, I found my master weaver and started to learn with her in her house.

Weaving in the community workroom is a kind of 'new' apprenticeship, which is different from the 'old' one. The 'old' apprenticeship was between relatives or

neighbours, and hierarchy existed because of the skill involved. They produced objects at home and thus there was no clear cut division between working hours and other daily activities. The weaver worked as much as possible in order to make more products in exchange for more money, and the apprentice, usually the daughter, could only follow. However, in the community workroom, the makers who came from different areas of Yuanli usually met each other there for the first time. What they had in common was that they all needed this occupation, which was offered by the community association with the help of government subsidies. Hierarchy existed because of institutionalisation, that is, workers had to obey the manager's instructions, although the manager's skill was not at all higher than the worker's skill. They produced objects at the community workroom rather than in their own houses, and the working hours were from eight to five every weekday. At five in the afternoon, most makers went home immediately.

Finding a master weaver in order to practice the 'old' style of apprenticeship was one of the first things that I wanted to achieve in the initial period of my fieldwork. However, it was not until nine months later that I could find one generous and skilful weaver who was willing to teach me in her house. I met my master weaver in the TREH in March 2006. However, it was not until August that I finally had the chance to ask her whether I could be an apprentice and learn weaving from her. When we worked in her house, she still had to make products for the TREH shop. For her, teaching an apprentice who was at the primary level like me was quite time-consuming. I appreciated the fact that she was willing to 'waste' her time and teach me patiently, and I always worried whether or not I delayed her work and made her earn less. She never showed the slightest impatience towards me though.

My master weaver was trained in the 'traditional' way of weaving, which was the way people learned in the past (see Chapter Three). Also, with the experience of teaching in the TREH, as well as other places where she was invited to, she developed her own way of teaching. It was a combination of old and new, which was how I learnt with her. In all of the three phases of my apprenticeship, I observed the weaver's 'traditional' ways of learning and memorising techniques. She concentrated

on the pattern, figuring out the way of working it, and memorised the visual image in her mind. I always wanted to write down the steps of how the pattern was made in order not to forget it, but my master weaver always stopped me and said, ‘you just repeat weaving the pattern and you will remember. Never write it down – you can try but you will find it useless.’

Through practising my apprenticeship with my master weaver, I found myself gradually transforming from an ‘outsider’ to an ‘insider’ in rush-weaving. When I struggled in the process of learning, I understood fully the huge difference between ‘seeing’ and ‘doing’ rush-weaving. My master weaver frequently talked about the day when I first asked her to take me as an apprentice, and always had a good laugh about it. After she agreed to teach me, I told her that I wanted to make a product using the most difficult ‘four-frame pattern’ technique. She did not tell me until later, when we were closer to each other, how impossible it would have been for me to achieve it, instead she allowed me to come to that realisation in the process of learning. An outsider can easily misunderstand that rush-weaving production can be accomplished without difficulty. This is because proficient weavers make the processes look simple and easy. In fact, the only way to truly understand the skill involved is to practice weaving oneself. It is through this that one comes to realise how difficult it is to control and distinguish the pieces of rush in one’s hands, not to mention that the most difficult products can require three or more years of training. There is no fixed period of learning in the process of becoming a skilled and established weaver. My master weaver told me that, ‘this skill involves a lifetime of learning. You will never reach the end of learning it. I am fifty-six now and I am still learning.’

It was also through the apprenticeship that I realised the standard of a beautiful product (see Chapter Two). I was really excited when my master weaver kindly agreed to accept me as an apprentice. This meant that I could finally experience being an apprentice in the way in which people did in the past, and thereby understand the manner and aesthetics embedded in the process of weaving. As my master weaver and I worked together, I could observe what she was making, while

she also paid attention to whether I was doing it correctly. Sometimes she would weave a line or two on my object to modify it and to once again show me the technique. In the process of learning, my master weaver pointed out my shortcomings, which helped me understand the principles on which a piece of work is judged.

Apart from apprenticeship, the other methods I employed in the fieldwork included participant observation, formal and informal interviews, archival research, and visual methods (photographs taken by myself and others, and videos produced by others). In addition to my apprenticeship in rush-weaving, I worked as a volunteer in the TREH and the community centre, and as a helper in several hat-and-mat shops. I also worked with farmers in the paddy field. Following Yuanli people's daily schedule, I participated in everyday events including doing the laundry in the river, taking dance lessons in the community, and so on. All of these helped me to obtain an overview of the local everyday life. I visited the field again for ten days in July 2008, in order to obtain data which I found I needed in the process of writing up my thesis. In terms of language, I can speak the Holo language (my mother tongue) and Mandarin. Generally speaking, in the field I spoke to elderly people in the Holo language and the younger generation (below forty) in Mandarin, according to their preference of language usage.

The economics of the rush-weaving industry will be detailed in the next chapter, and here I provide a brief description of the general picture. The practice of rush-weaving is predominately an economic activity and a livelihood for Yuanli people. Not everyone would become a weaver. In terms of gender, almost all weavers are women. It is not because men are excluded or forbidden from being a weaver. Rather, it is because Yuanli is a society where the principal livelihood is farming. In the past, especially, men worked in the field or as wage labours and women made rush-woven products as well as doing housework. In terms of class, in the past as in the present, girls and women from better-off households do not weave. Only in those families which needed rush-weaving to generate cash income did all the women of the family devote their time to making rush-woven products. Thus, generally speaking the

living and working conditions of the weavers are hard. Usually they either never attended school and are therefore illiterate, or they only received a very low level of education.

Although for those women whose livelihood is weaving, making objects for sale is an important source of income, they are very poorly paid. Most of the time a weaver can only get less than half of the price of a product. Her earnings are never equivalent to her labour. However, such income that women contribute in a household is, especially in the past, higher than the portion contributed by men. However, weaving is called a ‘subsidiary activity’, which means that women work hard to supplement the farming income by weaving. Despite the inappropriate nature of this term, rush-weaving is indeed a subsistence activity that supports the life of many families, especially when the men in the family, either as wage labourers or farmers, fail to provide money for everyday living needs or for the education of their children.

Along with the changes of the past decade, nowadays there is another kind of weaver. They take up rush-weaving as a hobby, that is, something like quilting or stitching. They enjoy weaving, attending training classes, being innovative and designing new articles, and making objects for competitions or exhibitions.

Another transformation within the rush-weaving industry relates to the gender of merchants. In the past most merchants, shopkeepers, and middlemen were male. Even if the husband and wife worked together, usually the wife occupied the role of helper to the husband. Nowadays, though, from my observations, usually the husband and wife run their business together, and sometimes the wife even plays the central role. For instance, in one case the husband was in charge of processing objects, e.g. modelling hats into their final shape, in the small factory behind the shop. Meanwhile, the wife was responsible for buying products from weavers, dealing with buyers and their orders, sending or delivering products to buyers by post or by van, and sometimes selling products in the stall in local events. In a word, the wife was the core of the business.

The structure of the thesis

In this thesis I argue that rush-weaving as people's livelihood is deeply embedded in the relationship between a weaver and her environment, and that the idea of heritage and the museum, as they are perceived and enacted locally in everyday life, are contradictory and problematic for many people. I argue that a weaver's life is the embodiment of the transformation of the rush-weaving industry. The complex and changeable relationship between the individual and historical context, and between the individual and her environment, are all inscribed in the life of a weaver. Nowadays rush-weaving is good work, though not good labour, for the weavers.

In Chapter One, I examine the economics and the historical background of the rush-weaving industry. I explore the organisation of the industry, and find that the value of rush (the material of weaving) is related to the value of time. I argue that how the weavers perceive the rush represents the way in which they value their time; meanwhile, however, the time and effort that a weaver spends on a product are not equivalent to what she can earn from the product. Many weavers regard their earnings as meagre at present, which I suggest is due to the fact that weaving as work does not bring adequate income, that is, a weaver's earnings are never equivalent to her labour. By examining the way in which the commercial transaction of rush-woven objects developed as an economic activity, whereby completely handmade commodities were produced on a large scale by a rural labour force, thereby creating the rush-weaving industry, I suggest that the colonial and cross-cultural encounter between Japan and Taiwan has shaped the characteristics of the commodity and the industry. From 1945 onwards, industrialisation and then global competition of labour force had caused the rush-weaving industry to decline. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, there has been a revival of the practice of rush-weaving.

Chapter Two portrays the weavers' practice of weaving in relation to her environment, body and senses, knowledge and skill, and personality. I closely examine the everyday life of a weaver, who took rush-weaving as her livelihood, in

order to understand how she incorporated the various parts of the practice of weaving into her daily schedule. Through investigating the process of production, I argue that the central character of rush-weaving lies in the weaver's understanding of the qualities of the material, her perception of the changing conditions of the environment, her knowledge and skills in making the object, and that through the combination of these factors she produces consistently beautiful products. The beauty of the rush-woven object matters and the standards of beauty are achieved through the means of each weaver's *chhiu-lo* (the way of hand-making, the personal skill and style of a weaver).

I continue to look at the way in which weavers' practice of weaving and their products are gradually recruited in the emerging heritage movement in Chapter Three. I first of all examine the political contexts which engendered the heritage movement in Taiwanese society. Bearing in mind the political connotations of the heritage movement, I turn to look at local people's perception of the phenomenon by which rush-weaving production, rush-woven objects and weavers are regarded as 'heritage'. Trying to answer what it means for Yuanli people to have their livelihood described as 'heritage' and how the notion of heritage works in local society, I argue that this amounts to far more than rush-weaving being given a particular status with symbolic meanings. Rather, as a consequence of rush-weaving becoming heritage, Yuanli people have various and even contradictory opinions about the phenomenon, and this phenomenon also causes them to have complex and conflicting emotions towards the connections between the past and present within the rush-weaving industry. Meanwhile, 'tradition' versus innovation has become an issue in the production of rush-weaving.

Finally in Chapter Four, I explore the ways in which the local rush-weaving museum came into existence and whether it plays a role in the everyday lives of the people of Yuanli. The museum is essentially part of the state's nation-building project. While the museum is expected, through its operation in local society, to forge identity, it is a fact that the museum, as a contested terrain, witnesses and gives rise to more disputes of difference than the anticipated harmony of sameness. While the museum has

brought a new way of learning rush-weaving skills and knowledge, it does not change the relationship between a weaver and her practice of weaving, which at the core is the interrelationship of a weaver, the material of weaving, and their environment.

In the Conclusion, I draw together the various strands of arguments. In trying to determine the social logic which underlies the choice of the Yuanli weavers to continue the practice of rush-weaving, I attempt to make some broader points about the relationship between the artisans and the objects they create, in Taiwanese society, and their relevance to how we think about technology and society in general.

Chapter One

The Economics and Historical Background of the Rush-weaving Industry

In this chapter I describe the economics and the historical background of the rush-weaving industry, in order to set out the context in which the research for this thesis was carried out. I focus on a number of issues including the weavers, who they are, the type of weaving which they do and the internal organisation of the industry. I then analyse the main characteristics of the historical development of the industry, in order to provide a clearer understanding of how the industry has become what it is today. Based on this economic and historical context, I ask the question: why do the Yuanli weavers of today still choose to practise rush-weaving? This question will be answered toward the end of this thesis, in Chapter Four, where I will also address the meaning of rush-weaving as work at a time when, as a livelihood, it is in decline.

Who are the weavers?

The weavers who I worked with from 2005 to 2006 were aged from their fifties to their eighties. During my year of fieldwork I met only four weavers, or more specifically learners in a rush-weaving training class, who were aged in their forties, and they were the youngest generation of weavers. In addition, all of the weavers were women. Almost all of them had started weaving by the age of eight or nine, certainly no later than ten years old. Some of them left the rush-weaving industry after getting married, due to the demands of raising children, doing housework, or helping in the husband's family's business. Some of them left the industry between the 1960s and 1980s, when the rush-weaving industry was less commercially prosperous, and some of them stopped weaving due to the physical problems caused by weaving, and took up another occupation instead. A few of them continued to work as weavers throughout the good times and bad times of the industry. Some who left the industry returned to weaving in the last decade owing to efforts devoted to the revival of the industry. In 2005 and 2006, when I conducted my fieldwork, there

were about two hundred rush-weavers in the Yuanli Township, according to an estimate by the director of a local museum of rush-weaving called the 'Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall' (hereafter TREH).

Given the differences in age and generation between weavers in their fifties, ranging through to eighties, their lives and work are testament to a variety of different as well as shared experiences. However one thing that they have in common is the reason they became weavers. They started weaving mostly because their households needed them to work and earn money for subsistence. In other words, they are not from wealthy families. So, when these weavers first learned their craft, rush-weaving was very much a money-generating activity for the household. For many, in childhood the household had lacked the money to pay for them to attend school. Instead, they helped with housework such as cooking, and later on they took up weaving. Those who had had the opportunity to attend school, either because their families were slightly more prosperous and could afford to send them or because they were of a younger generation, did not have to become weavers, though they would still help with weaving after school. By contrast, girls and women from better-off households did not need to weave.

It is fair to speculate that weavers, regardless of the generation they belonged to, lived a 'hand-to-mouth' life when first they practised their craft, whether in the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s. As far as I can ascertain, most weavers would probably not have starved if they had given up weaving, as at least half of the population grew crops on their farms, either for selling in the market or for household use, and obtaining food was therefore less of a problem. However, it was necessary to weave in order to earn money for other living expenses. This is because, in those households where farming was the main livelihood, there was always the period between harvests; in households where men were waged labourers, there was no guarantee of employment and they may not have been in a position to send money back to their families. Thus, the cash income from weaving was important for the maintenance of the household, especially if there was a sudden and urgent need for money, to pay for medicine or tuition fees, for example. In such extremities, women would be able to earn quickly

by producing rush-woven products, thus meeting any shortfall which might arise in the household economy.

While most families were unable to send their girls to school due to financial constraints, in some households the girls would weave in order to support the costs of boys going to school. Boys also helped their grandmothers or mothers with weaving when they were young, but would not end up as weavers by profession. After marriage, it was normally women's work to take care of children, handle all of the domestic chores, raise chickens or pigs if they had them, and sometimes work in the fields where rice or other vegetables were grown. After all of this, some women stayed up late or all night to make rush-woven objects. In this situation, it was a double or even triple burden for these women.

Not all weavers were born in Yuanli or neighbouring areas where rush-weaving was practised. Some would only learn weaving after marrying into a family in Yuanli. In this situation, they would normally follow their mothers-in-law or other female family members in weaving. This is very similar to the way in which young girls learned weaving, which always took place in the family. Spending most of their time at home except when playing in the paddy fields, young girls had plenty of opportunities to observe their mother, grandmother, or other female relatives making rush-woven objects in the house. At first, they would usually pick up rushes which had been discarded by the household's weavers, materials which had split in the process of weaving or been cut when finishing the item. The unwanted rush would be used for something like plaiting or braiding, thus they would play and learn about weaving at the same time. Through constant observation and individual practice, these little girls would come to understand the basic techniques of weaving. Many of the weavers who I worked with recalled sitting quietly by a half-made mat and, with their mothers away cooking in the kitchen, stealthily weaving a line or two before they returned. This was essentially how these little girls were initiated into the craft. Gradually, their mothers or other female relatives would allow them to help weave the rush. After practising for several years, they would be allowed to weave their own objects independently, for sale. Although the work of a child would usually earn

less than that of an adult, sometimes a particularly adept girl weaver could earn as much as a senior weaver. Sometimes, the work of young weavers would even be used for samples which merchants could show to customers to help them choose products, or as an example piece to show other weavers how the product should be made so that the order could be met.

However, the reasons which may have prompted an individual to become a weaver in the first place, are not necessarily the same as those which motivate her work in the present; household economics usually change over the years. Often, weavers in their sixties or seventies would have between six to ten siblings. As such, their households would not be able to support them and they would have to support their households financially. However, weavers who are in their fifties tend to have fewer children to raise, usually less than five. More importantly, nowadays grown-up children will work and even bring money back into the weaver's household, if they are able to. I occasionally heard accounts of adult children asking their parents to retire from weaving, to spare them from the physical rigours of a craft which is exhausting even for the young. In such families, the income from weaving had ceased to be indispensable to the household. In addition, from 2002, the Taiwanese government started to provide a state pension of NT\$3000 (about £60) every month, for those aged 65 years or over, and who qualified for the pension. From July 2007, farmers and fishermen became eligible for a special monthly pension of NT\$6000, again if qualifying and over the age of 65. The National Pension scheme came into effect in October 2008, and stipulates that every citizen who is between age 25 and 65 has to pay a monthly insurance premium, and will get the pension, normally at least NT\$3000 every month, on reaching the age of 65. Under these provisions, most Yuanli weavers can get either the pension for farmers and fishermen, or the National Pension.

Nevertheless, nowadays the income from weaving is still indispensable to some weavers. It is often because these weavers have to raise their grandchildren, or they have suffered from some sort of misfortune. Often their husbands are farmers, and they sometimes help their wives to transport the rush-woven products to the shops by

motorcycle. However, a group of weavers which did not exist before has appeared in the last decade. Some of them have returned to weaving after a break of two to three decades, and a few of them have learned to weave only recently. What they have in common is that they do not have to worry about the household finances, but simply wish to practise rush-weaving. Some of them treat rush-weaving as serious work, whereas others see it as a leisure activity. These weavers' husbands are usually retired teachers and policemen, and owners of the family business such as a furniture shop or bicycle shop. Some of them are widowed.

The weavers who I met lived in their own houses. Normally it is the weaver and her husband who will occupy the house and their children will leave Yuanli to work elsewhere, usually in urban or industrial areas. It is normal for a middle-class household to live in a two or three-storey building in rural Taiwan. Weavers not under pressure to earn usually live in these kinds of houses. In contrast the house of a weaver who still depends on the earnings from weaving is often very basic, consisting of one living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom and toilet. The floor of the house is paved with cement, rather than the brick, pebble, tile, or marble, which are to be seen in middle-class or wealthy households.

What is 'weaving'?

The craft which these Yuanli artisans are practising is actually something between plaiting, knitting, and weaving. It is very important to point out that these artisans do not weave on looms. Most of the time, a weaver sits on the ground and uses her hands to make objects, and sometimes she also uses her toes, feet, or other body parts to help her hands (see Picture 1). Only very simple tools are used, which may include a wooden hammer, a bamboo stick, a stainless steel or plastic cup, or a plastic sprayer, and a damp cloth, a needle, bricks, a ruler with Taiwanese measures, and wooden models. Because only these simple tools are needed in the work of production, a weaver does not need much capital to begin her career in weaving.



A weaver making a handbag, using her foot as an aid

The practice of rush-weaving involves the household production of objects for outside merchants, and its artisans are cottage weavers. Yuanli weavers work in their own houses. A weaver's work is not only about weaving, but also includes other aspects. A weaver needs to buy rush for her production. The procedure for weaving includes three main parts. Firstly, there is preparation before weaving. The weaver goes to the rush-shop, selects the rush relevant to her needs, and buys the appropriate amount according to her requirements. Then she needs to decide if it is necessary to dye the rush. The rush should be dried in the sun no matter if it is going to be used soon or stored. This is to avoid mildew ruining the rush, as well as turning the rush an attractive colour. The weaver then chooses suitable rush for the next production, selecting it in terms of length, the degree of thickness, and the hardness or softness of the rush. Then each single piece of rush is split into several smaller pieces if she is going to make a fine-grained product. Following that she moistens the rush with water, softens the rush with a wooden hammer, and sometimes rubs the rush to adjust the shape, after which it is ready for weaving. Secondly, in the process of weaving, except for making hats and very small objects, a weaver always sits on the ground, and spreads the prepared rush according to the particular article being made. Having arranged the rush in a certain order, she fixes it in shape with a split bamboo and ties

the bamboo with rope, when making a mat. She uses a wooden model to fix the shape if she is producing a hat or a handbag. She then weaves the initial section, the pattern section (in terms of flat objects like mats) or the form of the shape (in terms of objects such as hats or handbags), and then the final section. Different techniques are required to weave each of these sections. Apart from weaving the main body, she adds necessary decoration every now and then. Thirdly, after finishing an object, she has to take good care of it. This is because in the process of production moisture is applied to the article to make the rush soft and pliable and the weaving easier. Again, the finished article ought to be dried in the sun to prevent mildew from forming.

The weaver sits on the ground to make mats and handbags, and only when she is making hats will she sit on a stool while using a set of wooden models on her laps. The wooden model sets used for making hats are comprised of two sections. When a hat is being woven, it is upside down and in between the two pieces of the model. The upper piece is a half ball, the shape of a head, and the lower piece is a wooden box with a hole (about the same size as the upper piece) on the top and a round margin surrounding the hole (for the brim of the hat). The weaver starts from the centre of the top of the hat, and finishes at the edge of the brim. Thus, the models are used to make sure that a hat is woven in the right shape, and to support the strings of the hat in order to make the weaving easier (see Picture 2). Apart from the set of models for hats, there are also various kinds of wooden models for making handbags (see Picture 3).



Various tools for making and processing rush-woven objects, including the set of hat models and other wooden models



Various kinds of wooden models for making handbags

For the senior weavers, who have made rush-woven objects since the late Japanese colonial period or the early years after the Second World War, the models are extremely important and often indispensable in completing an object properly, as will be detailed in Chapter Three. Nowadays, though, only a very few weavers still keep a set of models for hats, not to mention the other various wooden models which, according to my informants, only one person who is in charge of processing still possesses.¹ Many weavers sold their wooden models to antique collectors or threw them away years ago, and it is difficult to find an artisan or carpenter who makes

¹ There is no name for these people either in the Taiwanese Holo language or in Mandarin, and therefore I need to use ‘the person (who is) in charge of processing’ whenever I refer to them.

these models now.

The number of rushes used in making an object varies in relation to its size and type, and it also depends on the degree of fineness of the object. For instance, for two objects of the same size but different fineness, the finer one needs thirty pieces of rush, whereas the other only needs twenty pieces. Generally speaking, a miniature hat brooch requires about 30 pieces at the beginning and 70 pieces at the end (see Picture 4). This is because when making a hat, a weaver adds pieces of rush along with the expansion of the hat from the centre to the brim and finally to the edge. In the case of a brooch, each piece is a split rush, about one third of the original rush plant (stem). In other words, only 25 pieces of rush stem are used in total. The rush of one *jin* (catty) is about 170 pieces of rush stem, and therefore can be used to make several very small products.² A medium-size handbag is made from about 180 pieces of rush. A double bed mat, six *chih* long by five *chih* wide, requires about 1,200 pieces of rush, which is about six to seven *jin* in weight.³



A miniature hat brooch

The variation of objects is made possible by using different patterns, shapes, and sometimes colours. A pattern is composed by the arrangement of plain grains (filled parts) and empty parts produced by changing the direction of each piece of rush (see

² *Jin* is a Taiwanese unit of weight equivalent to 0.6 kilogramme.

³ *Chih* is a Taiwanese unit of length equivalent to 0.3 metres.

Picture 5). There are basically two forms of patterns – one is geometrical, the other comprising figures and Chinese characters or English letters. Normally a geometrical pattern is repeated numerous times in an object, and more than one kind of geometrical pattern is used in the same object. However, only one figure or one set of characters and letters is incorporated in a particular object, though sometimes a weaver will put two different figures on the opposing sides of a handbag, in order to make the product more attractive (see Picture 6).



Patterns composed by the arrangement of plain grains (filled parts) and spaces



A weaver and her work, featuring the ‘male and female mandarin ducks’ pattern; the other side of the same handbag, with a different design

Nowadays, no machine is used for rush-weaving. Some historical documents suggest that small rush-weaving factories were set up in Yuanli in the past. Due to gaps in the historical records which are available, I speculate that, either different materials (that is, not *chhioh chhau*, literally mat rush) were used in machine production, or these factories were only for processing objects rather than for weaving products. I will

explain the actual differences between the weaving and processing of objects in the next section.

The rush-weaving industry

I explore four main aspects of the rush-weaving industry, which are the organisation of production, products, raw materials, and the market. I particularly focus on the analyses of two main issues in the organisation of production, being the value of rush in relation to the value of time, and what I call ‘price gap’. I argue that how the weavers perceive the rush represents the way in which they value their time; however, the time and effort that a weaver spends on a product are not equivalent to what she can earn when it is sold.

The organisation of production

Between 2005 and 2006, apart from approximately two hundred weavers, there were about ten rush-farmers, one rush-dealer who ran the only rush-shop, one rush-dyer, three persons in charge of processing semi-finished rush-woven products, four hat-and-mat retail shops, and a few wholesalers and traders. In addition, there was a newly-established local museum (TREH) and a community workroom for rush-weaving.

The rush-weaving industry is made possible by the interaction of three spheres of activity: agriculture, manufacture, and commerce. The first sphere, composed of the rush-farmer, the rush-dealer, and the rush-dyer, is responsible for providing the raw material for weaving. These days only a few farmers grow rush in their fields. There is now only one rush shop, whose owner, the rush-dealer, purchases rush from the farmers. There are two kinds of relationship between rush-farmers and the rush-dealer. If a rush-farmer practises contract farming with the rush-dealer, then the rush-dealer will buy all of his harvest and the farmer is not allowed to sell his rush to anyone else, including weavers. If it is not contract farming, a rush-farmer can sell his rush to whoever comes to his field to buy his harvest. The relationship between

rush-farmers and the rush-dealer changes according to the situation of the rush-weaving industry. In the year I spent in Yuanli, although only a limited number of rush-farmers grew rush, the demand for rush had increased from previous years owing to new developments in the industry, such as the TREH and the community workroom. So the rush-dealer asked the rush-farmers to practise contract farming in order to make sure that he could strike a balance between supply and demand. This satisfied the rush-farmers because the sale of their rush was guaranteed. After buying rush from farmers, the rush-dealer dries it thoroughly in the sun, and then sorts it into different grades by length, before selling on to the weavers. If a weaver needs coloured rush for her work, she first purchases rush in the rush-shop and then takes it to the dyer's house. There, the weaver chooses the colours she wants and the dyer dyes the rush to her specification.



A farmer in a Yuanli Township rush field during harvest



Drying rushes in the sun



The rush dealer and his son weighing his rush crop

The second sphere relates to the production of objects, and includes weavers and people who are in charge of processing. In making some objects, a weaver completes the majority of the article and it is finished by someone else. Take a handbag for example: the weaver makes the main body of the handbag and the person who is in charge of processing completes it by making handles and some decoration. Normally weavers do not meet the customers who buy their products, and the relationship between producers and consumers is mediated by merchants. A weaver usually sells her objects to shopkeepers or middlemen, who purchase and collect objects from weavers and then sell them to merchants, including retail shopkeepers and traders. In other words, the middlemen serve as points of connection in business between weavers and merchants. They were more common when the industry was prosperous. Nowadays most merchants tend to collect goods directly from weavers themselves; or, weavers go to shops in person to sell their products. Shopkeepers either take these semi-finished goods to the person who is in charge of processing, or process the goods in their own shops if they have the facilities and skills. The person in charge of processing modifies the article, for example by using a wooden model to improve the shape of a handbag, finishes it (for example, making the handle and button for the handbag out of rush), smokes the article with sulphur (to dry it, whiten it, and make it cleaner and insect-proof), irons and presses the article into the desired shape (e.g. a gentleman's hat or a cowboy hat), and finally spreads a special paste on the article to give more rigidity to the structure, if required. The process of production ends here.



Processing: the practitioner shaping the handbag with a wooden model and preparing it for the market

What then follows is the commercial activity conducted by the merchants, including sale in local hat-and-mat shops, retail shops in other places in Taiwan, as well as export, which is the third sphere of the rush-weaving industry. The rush-weaving business is usually a family business and all of the four hat-and-mat shops in Yuanli have been run for two or three generations. The son inherits the shop, company, and network (especially business partners) from the father, and the husband and wife usually work in the business together.



Selling rush-woven products from a stall at a local event



A hat-and-mat shop, selling rush-woven objects

Each of these spheres of the industry relates to one another, and each section is integral to the formation of a product. Without the special farmer growing rush and the rush-dealer arranging and selling rush, a weaver cannot make objects because she would lack the raw material. From the perspective of the person who is in charge of processing, an ‘unfinished’ product is not beautiful and cannot be sold in the market.

The value of rush, the value of time

A weaver needs to buy rush for her work. In terms of the cost, during my fieldwork in 2005-2006, the price for weavers was NT\$50 per *jin* (catty). I was told that the price had risen to NT\$54 in 2007, and it was around NT\$56 to NT\$57 in 2008, when I visited Yuanli again briefly.⁴ I can imagine that whether NT\$50 per *jin* is considered expensive or cheap depends on the perspective of the weaver or the non-weaver. In order to find out how weavers perceived the cost of rush, I observed how they dealt with rush, and examined the relationship between weavers and rush. There were two particular experiences during my rush-weaving apprenticeship which allowed me to learn about the relationship between weavers and rush, and which I suggest reveals the attitude a weaver has towards rush.

⁴ NT\$57 is about £1.2 (according to the exchange rate in September 2010, NT\$49 is equivalent to £1).

The first experience occurred when I was an apprentice in the community rush-weaving workroom, one sunny day while I worked with other weavers to dry the rush. We got all of the rush out of the storage room, and spread it out on the ground. We left it there and returned to our weaving indoors. Every now and then, one or two weavers stopped weaving, went to check the rush, and turned it from side to side. This was to let both sides of the rush dry evenly, and to ensure that the rush was not scorched and that the best quality was obtained. At sunset, before every one was about to go home, we collected all of the dried rush. We bundled a certain amount of it together and tied it tightly. This bundling and tying of large amounts of rush is a strenuous task requiring great effort. The rush will break if the bundle becomes loose. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that the rush is brittle after sun-drying, tying it too tightly would also risk breaking the rush. Therefore weavers must strike a balance between applying enough effort to fix it firmly in place, and applying too much effort and thus damaging the rush. However I never saw any one of them ruin the rush. Finally, we wrapped each bundle of rush in a big plastic bag which we closed by tying with a rope. This is to prevent its exposure to the air. All the efforts of everyone working that day would have been in vain if the plastic bag had not been correctly sealed, or had had holes in it unnoticed, as the rush would then have become dark (rather than golden and red) and might even have had mildew growth on it because of moisture. All of the bundles of rush, greater in length than the height of the average female weaver, went back into the storage room.

The second important experience for me was while I was an apprentice learning in my master weaver's house, when she taught me the way in which to split rush. Splitting rush was among the first things that I learned, because my master weaver insisted that I could not become a person who knows how to weave if I was unable to split rush by myself and so I learned how to do it from the very beginning. I had to distinguish a big rush (i.e. a thicker one) from a small one (i.e. the thinner one), and put rushes of the same thickness into a group. According to what I needed for the kind of object I intended to make, I chose a specific group of rushes and split each individual rush. On one occasion I was splitting a piece of rush into two parts, and one was bigger than the other. Only the bigger one was to be used, and the smaller

one was redundant. However, my master weaver taught me that the proper attitude is that I must keep both pieces rather than discard the unnecessary one, because it may be of use in the future. Similarly, when an object is finished, there is always extra rush left unused which should be cut off and then kept for later use.

By working with weavers when they dried the rush, I came to understand how they perceive and treat the rush. They were so careful about every detail, and paid so much attention to each piece of rush. In respect of the first experience described above, in my view this shows how seriously weavers cherish the rush. A statement by an informant vividly pointed out the relationship between weavers and rush: ‘a weaver takes care of the rush as if she were watching over her grandfather’. My interpretation of the second experience is that weavers always make the best use of each part of each piece of rush until the rush is no longer usable, rather than simply discard unused parts. I suggest that weavers fully utilised every piece of rush in order not to waste a single piece.

I found that almost every weaver holds such an attitude towards rush. I pondered the reasons for this, and believe that it is very possible that the attitude results from financial considerations. For weavers, rush is the means of earning money. If rush is ruined, it doubles the loss made: a weaver cannot earn money by making products from the rush on the one hand, and on the other she has incurred a loss from purchasing the rush in the first place. By contrast, some weavers use certain weaving techniques, such as making patterns, which need less rush than plain weaving, or they produce the same object with less rush by weaving the grains less tightly (but not loosely). Thus, the weaver is left with spare rush yet maintains the high quality of her products, which satisfies the buyer. Therefore they can make more objects with the same amount of rush and in turn save (and, in other words, earn) money. Thus, a weaver never makes objects with more pieces of rush if she can use fewer. Besides, making full use of every piece of rush is also a way of saving (and earning) money.

Nonetheless, I also found that the great care with which rush is handled is associated with something more than simply money. Taking account of the present living

standard in general, the price of rush at only NT\$50 per *jin* is indeed not that expensive but is affordable even to a weaver. For instance, the cheapest product on the market is the rush-woven hat inside a helmet, and by making one hat of this kind a weaver can get about NT\$20 to NT\$50 (depending on which merchant buys it). If a weaver gets NT\$50, the earnings from her cheapest product can buy her rush of one *jin*. However, the amount of rush needed for making a helmet hat is less than 0.5 *jin*. Hence, the care with which rush is treated hardly seems to reflect its relatively low monetary value, in terms of the amount of rush which is required to make each object. Therefore it is very likely that there is something beyond the consideration of money, in why a weaver treasures rush so much and thus treats it so carefully. In this case, I suggest that the weaver is concerned with the beauty of her products (see Chapter Two) because it is only when the rush is of the best quality that an object made from it becomes beautiful. Treating the rush properly and carefully is the best way to ensure its quality and thus its beauty.

However, apart from the aforementioned considerations of money and beauty, I suggest a third factor to be more crucial in respect of how weavers perceive the price of rush and how they treat rush. As I showed earlier, there are many procedures that a weaver must carry out in dealing with the rush even before she actually starts weaving. In particular, if rush is ruined in the process or discarded thoughtlessly, her considerable efforts spent on the rush so far are all to no avail. From this perspective, although the rush is relatively inexpensive, weavers never waste any rush in their production. Hence, it is not so much about the price of rush, but about the time which a weaver has spent in dealing with the rush from beginning to end. It is related to how weavers value the time spent in weaving.

How weavers value their time and effort is further related to the way in which they are paid. Merchants pay cash to weavers, who are paid for each finished piece. When merchants pay weavers by the piece, the price is supposed to include everything: a weaver's labour including the time that she has spent as well as her knowledge and skill, and the cost of raw materials. But the problem is that the pay is never equivalent to what a weaver invests in an object, at least from the weaver's point of

view. Although time spent on an object is not completely invisible but contributes to the quality of the final product, the pay is never really equal to the huge amount of time invested by the weaver. The pay is not equivalent to the time spent working with the rush, not to mention the time spent weaving the objects. This is where I found that the ‘price gap’ is really an issue.

‘Price gap’, fairness or injustice of pricing

By price gap I mean the difference between the money which a weaver can get by selling an object and the money earned by a merchant selling the same object to the customer. What I mean by price gap is different from profit margin. The gap was large in the business between a trader and a weaver. In the following paragraphs, I will carefully examine what I call ‘price gap’ which I think is the best way of illustrating the relationship between weavers and merchants.

Ong was a trader of rush-woven products who did his business with Japanese companies. His father used to be one of the most famous merchants in the rush-weaving industry and traded with Japanese people. Ong got involved in the industry and learned from his father how to run the business at the age of twenty-two. Later on he inherited the business from his father, and in total had been involved for thirty-five years when I visited him in 2006. His eldest brother was living in Japan and was responsible for the business at that end, whereas Ong collected goods in Taiwan and posted them to Japan. I had known Ong for almost ten years due to my previous research and he understood that I only wanted to study the rush-weaving industry. Thus, he was willing to tell me about the business and even to take me to the weavers’ houses when he collected products from them. Because it is not easy to find weavers who can make objects of very high quality, especially in recent years, each merchant usually keeps his or her weavers secret in order not to lose them to other merchants.

On the day, Ong and his wife drove their car to meet the weavers who worked for them, and they kindly let me join them. The weavers were three sisters, who were in

their sixties and seventies and all made rush-woven objects for sale on a regular basis. The products that Ong was going to collect were oval-shaped mats and rectangular-shaped mats. They were a set of semi-finished products – the oval mat, *chha-kiah-thun*, was going to be used to make a pair of slippers and the rectangular mat, *chhih-te-a*, was going to be used for making a purse – both were accessories for the Japanese *kimono* (traditional clothes). There were two kinds of quality for both mats: ‘ordinary’ and ‘deluxe’. The deluxe mat had seventeen lines in one *chhun* (see Chapter Two for ‘*kui-choah-chhun*’) and its price was double that of the ordinary one.

At first, Ong just engaged in casual conversation with the weavers; however, the mother of the three sisters, who was ninety-five years old, urged the three of them to hand over the mats to Ong. What followed was the process of negotiation between Ong and the three weavers. This process was relatively short, probably because they had already set up the price previously when Ong asked the weavers to make these objects. By contrast, later when Ong asked them whether they could make a double-bed mat for him and how much it might be, the process of negotiation was much longer. Both sides tried to avoid being the first to name a price, and used various strategies to get the most beneficial deal. In the end, the business of the double-bed mat remained unsettled, and one of the three weavers said that she would think about it and give Ong a call to let him know the price.

After we left the weavers’ house, in the car Ong told me more about the sale of the mats that he had just collected. I was surprised by the price gap. Certainly I knew about the price gap before that day. However, the gap was even larger in the business transaction between the trader and the weaver, than between the retailer and the weaver. For instance, in terms of buying exactly the same helmet hat product (i.e. same size, same quality), the TREH would pay the weavers NT\$50, a middleman would pay NT\$30, and Ong said that he only paid NT\$20. A customer, however, would pay NT\$100 for this hat. In this case, Ong would earn NT\$80, although he has to pay for the processing and posting, while the weaver only receives NT\$20, and she also has to pay for the rush.

The price gap is even larger in the transactions for products of a higher price and the pay weavers receive is even more unbalanced if one takes into consideration the time they spend in production. Take the mats that Ong bought from the three sisters for example. A weaver spends one day making a pair or one month making ten pairs of the ordinary oval mat. She earns less than NT\$9000 per month. Ong sells these to his customers for double his purchase price, per pair. The price of the deluxe oval mat is double that of the ordinary one, but a weaver makes fewer pairs because each pair is much finer and takes longer to complete. She makes three pairs of the deluxe oval mat per month and earns even less than she did from making the ordinary oval mat. A weaver can make more objects if she has time and when Ong promises to buy as many pairs as she makes, but she can only produce fewer items if she is busy or if Ong does not buy as many goods, for example in the low season. Even though there is the potential commercial risk which the merchant has to carry (but the weaver does not) and therefore the merchant aims to make reasonable earnings from the trade, I argue that the price gap is still very large. Despite the fact that the amount of money a weaver can get from selling an object varies, as it depends on the kind of product she makes, generally speaking a weaver gets less than fifty percent of a product's final selling price.

The price gap contains several aspects. Firstly, taking the time and effort which a weaver spends on each object into consideration, her income is far less in proportion to her work. Secondly, in the negotiation between the merchant and the weaver, both have knowledge of rush-woven objects, though the way that they obtain the knowledge is very different. However I was surprised to find that the merchant's considerable knowledge of rush-woven objects and exceptional ability in distinguishing the quality of products, were employed as a means to exploit the weavers. Certainly, a weaver is not simply passive or oppressed, but fights for herself in the process of negotiating with merchants. In this process, a merchant always lowers the price whereas a weaver tries hard to make the price as high as she can. Thirdly, in spite of the transformation of rush-woven objects into heritage and museum collections (see Chapters Three and Four), rush-weaving has not in turn

become artwork that can be sold for a high price and the weaver's earnings have not increased dramatically. The transformation has not altered the underlying circumstances in terms of the price gap, and the economic and social situation of the weaver. Hence, even though a weaver buys rush for her work and therefore has some control over which merchant she chooses to work with, the established relationship between the weaver and the merchant largely limits the control the weaver has over the transaction. It makes little difference, which merchant the weaver chooses to work with.

In the above case, one finds that weavers can only make a limited number of pieces in a month, and that number is even fewer if she makes products of high quality or large size. For instance, a double-bed mat takes at least one month to complete, whereas a helmet hat needs just half a day. However, merchants can buy as many products as they wish as long as they have the capital and there is the demand. A weaver's income is not secure, but relies on the products that she can make. In terms of the average income of a weaver, it really depends on what kind of products she is asked to make, whether the demand is in a slump or a boom, and how much time she can devote to weaving. Generally speaking, a weaver, who makes rush-woven objects on a daily basis, can earn about NT\$10,000 to NT\$20,000 per month (in 2005 and 2006) by weaving. Nevertheless, a weaver may have other sources of income apart from weaving, such as teaching and performing rush-weaving, or selling some agricultural products which she grows, and the weaver's income forms only part of the income of her household.

To give a sense of the amount a weaver earns, I will provide some other figures for comparison. Although being a weaver is not equivalent to a wage labourer or a person working in an urban company in many respects, it is worth looking at some general wage statistics. The basic (or minimum) monthly wage in Taiwan of an individual who is over 15 years old is NT\$17,280 (The Department of Health, R.O.C. 2009: 91).⁵ In addition, in terms of living expenses, which are different in urban and

⁵ In terms of the definition of 'the basic wage', according to the Labor Standards Act, Article 21: "A worker shall be paid such wages as determined through negotiations with the employer, provided, however, that such wages shall not fall below the basic wage. The basic wage referred to in the

non-urban areas, the minimum subsistence of the region to which Yuanli belongs was NT\$9,210 in 2006 and NT\$9,829 in 2008 (Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C. 2009: 85).⁶ According to the regulations of the central government, people whose incomes are below this figure are regarded as ‘poor’. Though I am comparing the income of a Yuanli weaver to these figures, and argue that the weaver does not have an ‘adequate’ income from weaving, I would also argue that she is not poor. Some weavers may earn close to the minimum for subsistence, but most weavers have more income than that.

Hence, although weaving is the livelihood of these artisans and they only obtain limited earnings by weaving, they are not poor. It is true that most weavers are still making objects for a living, which means that the earnings are very important in order to maintain their everyday lives. Despite this situation, they do not earn close to subsistence level. Among the weavers I met in 2005 and 2006, they were all able to meet the costs involved in buying outright a year’s supply of rush. Moreover, some of them could also afford the expense of travel and entertaining friends and relatives.

The weavers who I worked with often talked to me about their memories of weaving

preceding paragraph shall be prescribed by the basic wage deliberation committee of the Central Competent Authority and submitted to the Executive Yuan for approval. The matters of organization and procedure of the basic wage deliberation committee, shall be regulated specially by Central Competent Authority.” (<http://laws.cla.gov.tw/Eng/FLAW/FLAWDAT0201.asp>, accessed September 2010). Also, according to the Enforcement Rules of the Labor Standards Act, Article 11: “The basic wage mentioned in Article 21 of the Act refers to remuneration received by a worker for normal working hours, excluding, however, overtime pay and additional payments for overtime work in ordinary leave or public holidays”, and Article 13: “When a worker’s working hours are less than eight hours per day, the basic wage shall be calculated pro rata in accordance with the working time, unless otherwise stipulated in the works regulations, the employment contract, or any relevant laws or regulations”. (<http://laws.cla.gov.tw/Eng/FLAW/FLAWDAT0201.asp>, access September 2010).

⁶ In terms of the definition of ‘the minimum of subsistence’, according to the Public Assistance Act, Article 4: “The foresaid minimum of subsistence is computed by the central and municipal competent authorities as 60% of the per capita nonproductive expenditure of the latest year announced by the central department of budget, accounting and statistics. In addition, the minimum of subsistence shall be subject for review every three years. Municipal competent authorities shall report the minimum of subsistence to the central competent authority for review and reference” (<http://law.moj.gov.tw/Eng/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?PCode=D0050078>, access September 2010). Also, according to the Enforcement Rules of the Public Assistance Act, Article 2: “The standard amount adjusted annually to low income families and the minimum of subsistence respectively according to Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 4 of the Act are announced by the competent authorities under the jurisdiction of Central and Municipality Governments by September 30 of the previous year” (<http://law.moj.gov.tw/Eng/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?PCode=D0050079>, accessed September 2010).

in the past, and I found that they see their earnings in the past and at present in different ways (see Chapter Three). Many weavers think that the income from weaving was good in the past but meagre at present. Comparatively speaking, they were satisfied with their earnings when they were young. While men farmed in the fields or worked as wage labourers, women wove in order to earn cash. With this, women could provide their households with better food and their children with better education. At that time, the weavers' households were not rich but were 'wealthier' than ordinary households. Some weavers told me that the income that women contributed to the family, especially before the 1960s, was higher than the proportion contributed by men. However, weaving was called a 'subsidiary activity', which means that women worked hard to supplement the farming income by weaving. Despite this rather inappropriate title, rush-weaving was indeed a subsistence activity that supported the life of many households, especially when the men in a household, either as wage labourers or farmers, failed to provide money for everyday needs.

To sum up this section on the organisation of production, I argue that although many weavers, based on their own comparisons, believe that their earnings are meagre at present, weavers are not poor and a weaver's life in contemporary Yuanli is not miserable. Rather, I suggest that it is weaving as work that does not bring adequate income. The problem is that a weaver's earnings are never equivalent to her labour. I suggest that this is due to a lack of fairness in pricing. Roy Dilley (2004) studies Senegalese craftsmen and uses the term 'true price' to describe the Haalpulaar conception of 'right price' which is very common throughout West Africa. According to Dilley, prices were arrived at through social processes, rather than set by organised councils, guilds, or assemblies of producers or traders. But there were limits in terms of what was considered 'right' for a weaver to make in profits, and what a weaver considered to be right. Most importantly, as Dilley asserts, through the cultural conceptions connected with the social processes of pricing, the weavers' role in the production of cloth is acknowledged (2004: 802-3). In the Yuanli rush-weaving industry, I suggest that even though there are negotiations between weavers and merchants, the process of negotiation mostly results in a lack of fairness in pricing. Indeed, it is the merchant who determines the level of profits appropriate for the

weaver, not the weaver herself. At the end of this chapter, I will return to this issue of rush-weaving as work and incorporate it into the discussion of work, labour, value, and identity.

Products

Even though other fibres were used in making objects in the past, nowadays Yuanli rush-woven objects are all made from the stem of the rush. These products are meant to provide a feeling of ‘coolness’ and ‘freshness’. Thus the objects are ideal for using in hot weather, that is, they are ‘*natsumono*’ in the Japanese language, as an exporter of rush-woven products to Japan described to me, literally meaning ‘summer things’. Used as bedding or sunshade, the most popular products are mats and hats. As a result, people call the raw material ‘mat grass’, the industry ‘hat-and-mat business’, and the shop ‘hat-and-mat shop’. In the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945), rush-woven products were regarded as luxury items, that is, as high-quality items of practical use. Today the situation varies for different people. Elderly people who received Japanese education, which influenced the development of their taste, still treat rush-woven products as luxury items, whereas the younger generation tend to see rush-woven goods as the products of nostalgia, or as troublesome objects that need careful maintenance.

Producers of rush-woven objects are usually not the users of their own products, because products are made for sale, rather than for the producer’s or seller’s own use. In addition, rush-woven objects are made, for the most part, for practical use in people’s daily lives. Nevertheless, in the recent transformation of rush-weaving into heritage, a few ‘artist’ weavers make rush-woven objects, have them framed, and hang them on their walls, and these rush-woven objects are treated as artistic works like paintings and as decoration instead of simply craft objects.

The present range of products amounts to more than seventy, and there can be many more. This is because of the variations in colour or size, and also because special orders from customers are accepted and new designs are made according to their

demands and preferences. The range of products include: bedding (e.g. bed-mats, cradle-mats, pram-mats, and pillow-mats and pillow-cases); hats for women, men and children; ‘utilities’ such as business card cases, slippers, shoe-pads, seat-mats, diverse handbags and purses, mobile phone cases, briefcases, pencil-cases, desk tidies, tobacco cases, tea caddies, tissue holders, and fans; accessories (e.g. brooches and mobile phone accessories); ornaments (e.g. the ‘male and female mandarin ducks’ mat, the ‘dragon and phoenix’ mat); costume (e.g. belts, ties and even bikinis); other souvenirs.

The raw materials

Throughout the development of the rush-weaving industry, more than one kind of raw material has been used in making products. Other materials that have been used apart from rush include: thatch pandanus (screw pine), pulp twine, cypress shreds, hemp, palm, coconut leaves, raffia, and *Carludovica palmata* Ruiz & Pavon (see Sie and Pan 1955; Guo 1985). The material used in contemporary weaving is a particular type of rush – *Schoenoplectus triqueter* (L.) Palla – a type of sedge belonging to the *Cyperaceae* family (see Cai 1985). Originally a wild plant that grows in wetland in the west coastal area of Taiwan, it is now planted in the fields and rush-farmers can harvest it three times per year. Weavers usually called it ‘*chhioh-chhau*’, a term in the Taiwanese Holo language which can be roughly translated as ‘mat-grass’, meaning ‘the grass used in making mats’. The part used in weaving is the stem of the rush, which is about 180 centimetres in length and triangular in shape. The stem is pliable, and therefore suitable for weaving. However, as Yuanli people told me, compared to those rush-mats that are woven by machine and made in other towns, *chhioh-chhau* – pliable but not rigid enough to be processed by machine – is not suitable for machine production. Furthermore, the rush cannot be harvested by machine, and is harvested from the field by hand. Thus, the price of rush is always twice as much as that of rice, as the former is harvested by manual labour whereas the latter is harvested by machine.

Due to the characteristics of the rush, throughout the history of Yuanli rush-weaving

weavers have only produced handmade objects. Everything is handmade and can only be produced one item at a time. A weaver usually spends from several days to several months weaving an object, depending on the type and the delicacy of the product. Unlike other towns where factories have been set up with several machines simultaneously weaving mats using another kind of rush, thus allowing large-scale production, Yuanli weavers always make objects at home, usually in the living room but sometimes in the bedroom.

The rush dealer runs the rush shop, where he buys the harvested plants from rush farmers, arranges and classifies the rush, and sells it throughout the year. The rush is classified by its length, and is sold by its weight. There are three harvests of rush in a year, and the rush from the third harvest is much shorter and thinner than that which comes from the first two harvests. Therefore, weavers tend to use the rush from the first two harvests in weaving (see Chapter Two). Usually a weaver buys the rush in a large amount, enough to use for the whole year of production, at the time of the first or second harvest, so that she need not worry about a shortage of material for weaving later on.

Markets for rush-woven products

Rush-weaving production in Yuanli has developed historically from the making of objects for personal use in daily life, a peasant sideline, into a cottage industry. After becoming a cottage industry in the 1890s, the rush-woven products have transformed from mainly being exports into commodities for the domestic market. The detailed historical development of the rush-weaving industry will be analysed later and here I focus on describing the different major markets for rush-woven products in various periods. It is after 1897, the third year of the Japanese colonisation of Taiwan, that rush-woven products became export commodities, being made mainly for export rather than for local use. The Japanese administration set up an institution to inspect the quality of rush-woven products, and exported them to many countries around the world. Japan was the primary market and products were also sold on from Japan to many other places in the world, including: the United States, China, Australia, Africa,

Germany, and Argentina (Sie and Pan 1955).

After the Japanese colonial period, since the 1960s, rush-woven objects have largely been sold in both the Japanese market and the Taiwanese market. In terms of the Taiwanese market, some merchants in the rush-weaving industry told me that, since the 1960s, the economic conditions in Taiwan have improved and individuals are able to afford rush-woven products, due to the economic development of Taiwanese society. Consumers went to purchase objects in the hat-and-mat shops of Yuanli as well as other places in Taiwan. Products included bed-mats, hats, and handbags, which were used as practical, everyday objects. More specifically, at present there are two kinds of consumers in the Taiwanese market. The first group, as mentioned, has appeared since the 1960s. These customers are fond of using rush-woven products and tend to go to hat-and-mat shops to make purchases. The second group has emerged in recent years and is growing. These customers come to Yuanli as tourists, buy rush-woven products, and are interested in sampling the local culture introduced by the museum or the community workroom.

In terms of the Japanese market, since the emergence of the rush-weaving industry at the end of the 1890s, the demand from the Japanese market fluctuated but was always continuous. The demand had always been met by the production in Yuanli and neighbouring towns; however, since the 1980s, the situation has changed. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, increasing numbers of weavers gradually ceased to produce rush-woven objects and chose to work in the newly established industrial factories where they could earn more money. Due to the shortage of weavers as well as the increasing wages of handicraft production, in the 1980s, some merchants in the rush-weaving industry, following the trend of many other industries in Taiwanese society, moved to other countries to establish new sites of production. Most of them went to China and to some Southeast Asian countries. At that time, the economies of these countries were not well developed, and wages were still low, which benefited the merchants starting businesses there.

These merchants brought everything with them to the new sites, including processing

machines, various products and skills, and even the rush plant. They grew the rush, had local people learn weaving, and then exported these products to sell in the Taiwanese market. Through the initiative of Taiwanese merchants, the rush-weaving industry in China developed and then Chinese merchants started their own businesses and went into competition against Taiwanese merchants in the markets. The competition between Taiwanese and Chinese merchants exists not only in terms of getting orders, but also when merchants collect objects from makers. Because Chinese merchants deliberately pay Chinese weavers higher prices, it is increasingly difficult for Taiwanese merchants to buy objects from these weavers. In this situation, Taiwanese merchants can no longer obtain large amounts of products in China, and therefore have fewer products than in the past to sell to their cooperative retailers in Taiwan. In such circumstances, they worry about being replaced by Chinese merchants who may have learned all the necessary techniques of the business. Taiwanese merchants regret this situation but it does not look like changing.

In addition, many shops in the Japanese market have turned to China when ordering products. Because Taiwanese merchants failed to provide enough goods to meet the requirements of Japanese merchants and Chinese products are much cheaper, most of the Japanese merchants have turned to China to buy rush-woven products. Consequently, Japan is no longer the main market for the Taiwanese rush-weaving industry. Nevertheless, a few Taiwanese merchants, including Ong, still collect products in Yuanli and neighbouring areas and sell them to Japan. Every year, Ong has to prepare and post all these products to Japan by the end of April. These are semi-finished objects, which will be completed and processed in Japan. The products are available in the market from mid-June/early July until the end of September.

According to traders who run their business between Taiwan and Japan and between Taiwan and China, although the rush-woven products of Yuanli and neighbouring towns and the products of China are in competition, there is a sharp distinction between the two. A Taiwanese exporter who sells products to the Japanese market told me that at present Japanese shops, especially department stores, tend to order products in bulk from Chinese merchants. In this way they can increase the amount

of ordered products and ask for an even lower price. These products, including seat-mats and bed-mats, require less specific techniques and can be made by Chinese weavers. By contrast, despite the supply of cheap products from China, nowadays some Japanese merchants still order certain products from Yuanli, such as the *chha-kiah-thun* and *chhioh-te-a*, both of which are products of fine and extra-fine texture. Japanese merchants order these Yuanli products because the specific techniques are demanding and only found in the hands of a skilful weaver. Chinese weavers are not capable of producing them.

In the contemporary Taiwanese market, like the Japanese market, consumers can access both Yuanli and Chinese products, and they can learn to distinguish the difference between the two with the advice of shopkeepers. Consumers who buy Chinese products are usually attracted by their inexpensiveness, whereas customers who are willing to pay more to purchase Yuanli products are interested in the quality and durability of products. For example, in the Taiwanese market, a Yuanli bed mat of the best quality and most detailed patterns will cost £330, whereas a Chinese bed mat of the best quality is £85. Also, a bed mat made in Yuanli will cost no less than £90. Thus, generally speaking, the rush-woven products of Yuanli and the products of China compete with each other in the form of high quality and high skill versus cheapness, no matter in which market. I shall now move on to examine the historical development of the rush-weaving industry.

Japanese colonisation and the formation of the industry

In the following sections on the historical development of the industry, it is not my intention to reconstruct a comprehensive history of the rush-weaving industry from 1895 to the present. Rather, through analysis of the historical development, I shall explore the implications behind the emergence of the rush-weaving industry, including what motivated the Japanese colonial administration to turn rush-weaving into an industry and how the significance of rush-woven objects was transformed as a result. I suggest that the way in which the rush-weaving industry was shaped under Japanese rule has created the fundamental characteristics of the industry and the

objects, although they were further transformed in the later period.

There were three periods of economic development during Japan's rule over Taiwan between 1895 and 1945. Before 1920, the sugar industry dominated Taiwan's economy. From 1920 to 1930, rice became the primary export. During these two periods, as noted by Mi-cha Wu, the primary economic policy of the Japanese administration was 'industry for Japan, agriculture for Taiwan' (Wu 2009). Wu describes how, between 1931 and 1945, the Japanese administration began to pursue a policy of industrialisation in Taiwan for various reasons including the Great Depression, competition between Japanese and Taiwanese agriculture, and war needs. However, interestingly, I did not find strong links between the development of the rush-weaving industry and the three periods of the economic development, although the industry was more related to agriculture than industrialisation. By this I mean that after 1930, under the policy of industrialisation, the rush-weaving industry kept developing, though not without ups and downs. Certainly the industry was influenced by crucial events such as the First World War and the subsequent economic depression and price fluctuation, and the Second World War and the difficulty of transportation and exportation. However, from historical documents including official statistics, such as *Sinjhujhou Tongjishu (The Statistics of the Sinjhu Prefecture)* (Sinjhujhou 1923-1941), which recorded figures on the agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial aspects of the industry every year from 1923 to 1940, it is difficult to tell, from the figures or descriptions, whether or not and how events like the Great Depression had an impact on the rush-weaving industry. Nevertheless, based on the historical documents, I suggest that, apart from the impact of the wars, the industry was much more influenced by factors such as the imbalance of supply and demand, the sufficiency of supply of the raw material or related materials for production, and fashion trends.

In terms of the development of rush-weaving in the initial years of the Japanese colonial regime, the industry prospered. For instance, after the Yuanli authority initiated the industry in 1897, the first company was set up by Dajia merchants in 1901 in order to proceed with production on a large scale and to expand the market.

In 1903, owing to the Dajia merchants' enthusiastic promotion of the Dajia hat at a commercial exposition held in Osaka, Japan, Osaka merchants introduced the Dajia hat to European and American merchants, and thereafter the exportation of the Dajia hat was initiated. However, the sudden increase of supply and consequent dramatic drop in price between 1905 and 1906 interrupted this early prosperity. With regard to exportation of the Dajia hat, the hats made out of thatch pandanus became more popular than the rush-woven hats, because the latter were ruined by mildew which developed in the process of transportation. However thatch pandanus needed to be treated with by nitric acid, the price of which increased considerably due to the First World War. Sulphur was substituted for nitric acid, but the quality of products deteriorated. The production of hats made from thatch pandanus was at its lowest point in 1923; meanwhile, hats made out of pulp twine replaced those made by thatch pandanus. Initially Dajia hats were only made out of rush and then thatch pandanus, but later on hats made out of other materials, including cypress shreds, hemp, palm, coconut leaves, and raffia, became popular due to fashion trends (Sie and Pan 1955; Guo 1985). According to information provided for visitors to the TREH permanent exhibition, the exportation of rush-woven products increased greatly in 1936 and over sixteen million rush-woven hats were sold in that year, ranking rush-woven products third in the top five selling products of Taiwan, after sugar and rice. This extraordinary situation was followed by depressed commerce in 1937 due to the Sino-Japanese War. Exportation became difficult before the war, and after the war broke out the ships for transporting products were attacked by bombs and sunk (Taiwan-sheng Miaoli-sian Wunsian Weiyuanhui 1960).

Yuanli rush-weaving before the Japanese colonisation of Taiwan

I discuss rush-weaving in Yuanli prior to Japanese colonisation, in order to understand what changed after Japan took over the governance of Taiwan in 1895. The Japanese colonial authority began thorough and systematic studies of Taiwanese customs and natural resources before taking over the country.⁷ Various investigations continued throughout the Japanese administration. Yuanli rush-weaving was included

⁷ See Introduction for a detailed account of the historical context of Japanese rule over Taiwan.

in official Japanese reports because the rush was regarded by the authorities as a natural resource of good quality and its use in producing objects as a profitable business. These Japanese reports, though limited by their highly political nature and singularly Japanese perspective, provide rich material for understanding the early development of Yuanli rush-weaving.

Among other official reports, *Dajialin Ji Tongjih Zuopin Diaochashu* (*An Investigative Report into Dajia Rush and Objects Made of It*) (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908) is a monograph on Yuanli rush-weaving. The material used in Yuanli rush-weaving production, i.e. *chhioh-chhau*, was generally known as ‘Dajia rush’ (*Dajialin*) because Dajia, a town neighbouring Yuanli, has been the major centre for selling rush-woven products ever since the beginning of the industry. Although this investigative report admits that some issues were still not certain and, I find, conflicting narratives were obtained, the general development of rush-weaving has been mapped.

According to this investigative report, it is certain that making of rush-woven objects in Yuanli and neighbouring towns predated the Japanese colonisation of Taiwan. The practice of rush-weaving had developed, according to Japanese investigations, from the early eighteenth century onwards. In the late nineteenth century it expanded, as people successfully transplanted the wild rush from the waterside (i.e. wetlands nearby the sea, estuary, and rivers) to paddy fields in order to obtain a greater quantity and better quality rush. At that time, rush-woven objects were made for the daily use of people, usually their producers. Objects were made as containers for rice and other grains. Sometimes these artefacts were made as gifts for relatives and friends, who lived in other places and did not make these objects for their own use. Some people bartered rush-woven objects in exchange for cloth and silk. Gradually the commercial transaction of these products developed. In this early stage of development, different ways of circulating rush-woven objects co-existed, and thereby objects could be gifts, goods for exchange, or commodities.

However, I suggest that the commercial transaction of rush-woven objects before the

Japanese colonial period was not on a comprehensive scale, which would only occur later. More importantly, production was mostly limited to mats and bags; the hat as a type of product had not yet appeared. Initially rush-woven objects appeared in this area because rush, as a wild plant, only existed in the natural environment of Yuanli and its neighbouring towns. But later on when it became an industry, more people living in other places became involved and the rush was no longer a wild plant but was transplanted and grown in fields such as paddy fields.

The emergence of the rush-weaving industry

In contrast to the earlier situation, the influence that Japanese people had on rush-weaving was to hasten the commercialisation of rush-woven objects and thereby create the rush-weaving industry. I suggest that without the transformation into industry and its subsequent development, the practice of rush-weaving could not become a large-scale, regional economic activity but would probably have remained a very small scale production and trade. Also, because the industry had been so prosperous, it has managed to continue despite the decline in the last few decades.

There were several significant changes after the rush-weaving industry came into being. Firstly, the characteristics of rush-woven objects transformed from an individually made object for daily use and domestic consumption, into being predominantly a market product. As a commodity, the user and producer of a rush-woven object were unlikely to be the same person. Secondly, rush-woven objects were not only circulated in Yuanli or Taiwan but also in Japan, which was the major market. Thirdly, due to the existence of the industry, more kinds of rush-woven products were available, and some were related to fashion trends, such as Dajia hats and tobacco bags. Fourthly, in order to control the industry and ensure its profitability, the Japanese administration set up an institute which drew up standards and an official system of examination of the products. Finally, the industry attracted many new participants, and thereby changed the everyday life of these people.

In the development of the rush-weaving industry, most important of all was the ‘invention’ of the hat as a new kind of product. Nowadays there are two competing accounts regarding the way in which the first rush-woven hat appeared. One is wide-spread among Yuanli people and is a story about the expression of motherhood and the relationship between a mother and weaver, Hong Yang, and her son. The other account comes from ‘official’ documents, and records the encounter between a Japanese governor and Yuanli weavers. The Japanese administration started in 1895, and set up the *Yuanli Banwushu* (The Local Office of Yuanli) in 1897. According to *An Investigative Report into Dajia Rush and Objects Made of It* and another report entitled *Sinjhujhou Maozih Yaolan (An Overview of Hat Production in the Sinjhu Prefecture)* (Sinjhujhou Maozih Tongye Zuhe 1939), in 1898, the official who was the head of the local office requested Hong Yang, a woman who lived in Yuanli and an experienced weaver, to make a hat in the form and style of a western dress hat, like the Panama hat, using rush. After she successfully made it, the local office started to promote its production, and turned it into an industry by asking Hong Yang to teach women in Yuanli and neighbouring areas the techniques of weaving. The skill of weaving a hat spread through the area with women teaching each other, and gradually more and more of them became involved in the industry. This was the birth of the first rush-woven hat, called the ‘Dajia hat’, and the beginning of the rush-weaving industry.

As soon as rush-weaving became an industry, Japan was the major market for rush-woven products. The articles made in Yuanli were all sold to Japan (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908: 1), and some were sold to other countries from there. Osaka was the main centre of distribution, where in 1908 the three major traders sold large numbers of Dajia hats. One trader sold 260,000, another trader sold 170,000, and a third trader sold 100,000. In addition, factories for processing were operating in Tokyo and Osaka, where rush-woven hats, which were semi-finished goods made in Taiwan, were modified to their final shape (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908: 65).

In the rush-weaving industry, rush-woven objects became associated with certain

characteristics that did not exist before. Firstly, various kinds of products were available, and they were divided into two categories: practical items and luxury goods. Dajia hats belonged to the former, whereas the latter included tobacco bags and insoles, which were made especially for people who were particularly fashion conscious (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908: 82). From this division, it is evident that fashion trends also became an issue for merchants of rush-woven products. They had to be aware that consumers were tired of old-fashioned products and therefore new styles were needed. Fashion trends mattered not only for luxury goods but also for practical items. For instance, when Dajia hats first appeared around 1898, people were curious about this novel product and became fond of it, which created a trend in consumption. However, within a few years, people's interest had changed and Dajia hats were out of favour with consumers (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908: 52, 83). Instead, some other types of hat were created and became more popular. It is important to point out that, while the Dajia hat is not the only kind of hat-product which has been available throughout the development of the rush-weaving industry, it is the most persistent one. Thus, the meaning of the Dajia hat will be examined later.

Secondly, problems arose in the rush-weaving industry. As described above, consumers would pursue fashionable articles which, as a consequence, were sold at a much higher price. Motivated by the high price of products and by the industry as a highly profitable business, weavers wanted to make more objects, middlemen tended to collect more goods from weavers, and rush-farmers devoted more fields to growing rush. All of these actions led to at least two phenomena. On the one hand, because of the enthusiastic weavers, middlemen, and rush-farmers, supply outstripped demand. On the other hand, as recorded in the official report (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908: 83-4), weavers were accused of being concerned only with the quantity of goods they were producing instead of being innovative and producing more elaborate articles. Middlemen were accused of simply competing with each other in order to obtain more goods from weavers, rather than developing sophisticated tastes in order to be aware of changes in the

Japanese market.⁸ Both phenomena caused the quality of goods decline. The consequence of the drop in price of rush-woven products was that, first of all, consumers' tastes tended to change suddenly and they disliked those products that had previously been popular. This led to a situation where it was very easy for supply to outstrip demand. In the end, consumers would no longer purchase poor-quality goods. The sudden fall in price was in diametric opposition to the expectations of merchants and rush-farmers, and this led to financial deficit.

Owing to such an unfavourable situation, the Japanese authorities later on set up regulations to inspect all of the hats before they were circulated in the market in order to control the quality of goods and keep the industry profitable. This is probably how the grading of workers' skills and products came into being, and the grading further proved how prosperous the industry had become. As far as the authorities were concerned, as stated in the official report (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908: 59, 64-9, 80-1), the industry expanded, which was evident in the way that both weavers and rush-woven products were systematically divided into grades, according to weavers' skills and the quality of the objects. The wages of weavers and the price of the products for different grades varied. Such divisions were made for further cost-benefit analysis by the authorities. For instance, a weaver of the highest grade could make the finest mat or hat, while a weaver of the lowest grade only made rough objects. If they were making the same kind of product, it took many more working days for the latter than for the former.

Rush-weaving becoming an industry also changed the lives of people. According to the official investigation (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908: 56-7), there were two or three individuals who wove objects for sale in every household of Yuanli and its neighbouring areas. The age of weavers ranged from between seven to fifty years old. Not only did participants in the industry increase, but the quantity of output and its value also grew. At the beginning, only 20,000 to 30,000 hats were produced in a year, but after a six-year period of development the output dramatically increased to over 700,000 hats per year. This situation led to a change in people's

⁸ Interestingly, the same kind of accusation took place in the 1900s and 2000s (when I was doing the fieldwork), and both blamed weavers for not being innovative. See Chapter Three for details.

occupations. Before rush-weaving became an industry, rush-weaving could only be taken on as a sideline career. After it developed and consumer demand increased, more and more people could take on weaving as a full-time job and career. However the historical documents do not record how this transformation and the boom in the rush-weaving industry changed the social lives of Yuanli people.

Japanese taste, the colonial gaze, and 'Oriental Orientalism'

In this section, I explore what motivated the Japanese colonial administration to turn rush-weaving into an industry. As I described above, Japan was the major market for rush-woven products. But why were Japanese people so fond of such objects? It seems that there were different reasons for different objects. Japanese people liked Dajia mats (i.e. bed mats) and tobacco bags because of their elegant colours, being warm tones of brown and yellow. The Dajia hat, which was called the 'Taiwanese Panama hat' by Japanese people, was regarded as similar in quality to, but much cheaper than, the genuine Panama hat. Besides, it was light in terms of weight and also flexible so that when the wearer was buffeted by the wind, the hat material would not break. Wearing a hat like this provided a pleasant coolness (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusankyoku 1908: 84). In general, Japanese people were attracted by the qualities of rush-woven objects because they were completely handmade, made of a natural material, and exuded a natural and delicate fragrance.⁹ Japan proved a prosperous market for rush-woven objects.

Hence, Yuanli rush-woven objects were turned into commodities to meet Japanese tastes and produced according to Japanese demand. For instance, the gentleman's hat and the tobacco case were made mainly for Japanese men, whereas the handbags and the sandal-mats went well with Japanese women's kimonos. As Yuko Kikuchi, the Japanese art historian of Taiwan, describes, the crafts which used bamboo or rush, among others, are all popular images of Taiwan created from a Japanese perspective (2004: 168-9, 2007a: 15). Japanese tastes and aesthetics, and their perceptions of Taiwan, are indeed complex issues.

⁹ My informants Lu Gim-ha and Ong Bin-pio respectively described it to me on different occasions.

The Dajia hat, a special kind of rush-woven object made in the western style, did not exist before Japanese colonisation. The appearance of the Dajia hat, and its subsequently crucial role, represents the most important influence which the Japanese authorities had on the development of rush-weaving. The Dajia hat, in the form and style of a western dress hat, was not the only type of hat that was made in the Japanese colonial period, but it was the most popular and most worn at the time. However, why was this hat a particularly desirable product to Japanese people, and furthermore, why did the hat have to be in a western style?

I suggest that there are at least two possible answers. By the time Japan started to colonise Taiwan, Panama hats were popular among Europeans. Japanese people were excited, as was described in the report on the investigation of Taiwanese resources (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusanikyoku 1908: 1), to discover that the material in Yuanli could be woven into something they regarded as the 'Taiwanese Panama hat', the quality of which is described above. This is how the so-called Dajia hat came into being and prevailed over the following decades. Nevertheless, the 'invention' of the Taiwanese Panama hat is further associated with Japanese modernisation in the late nineteenth century and the complex relationship between Japan and Western countries, and between Japan and Taiwan.

A Taiwanese historian, Rwei-ren Wu, has looked into these complicated relations (2006). He regards the Japanese colonisation of Taiwan, in contrast to European colonialism, as 'oriental colonialism', which is a combination of nationalism and colonialism. Japan, on the one hand, was situated on the periphery of the world, where Europe or Western society was at the centre. Japan wanted to catch up with Western countries and to be recognised by them, so it devoted itself to modernisation. As such, Japanese nationalism was characterised by its fear colonisation by Western powers, and reflected this fear in the measures which it took subsequently to avoid suffering this fate; it was also characterised by resistance to the notion of Western 'centrality' in world affairs and the correspondingly peripheral position of 'non-Western' countries (i.e. Western countries as the centre of global power and the

colonisers of others). On the other hand Japan was also in a position which allowed it to colonise its own periphery, that is, Taiwan and other places in Asia.

Yuko Kikuchi (1997, 2004, 2007a, 2007b) has also discussed the complex relationship between Japan and Western countries, and has referred to the nationalism of Japan as 'Oriental Orientalism' (Kikuchi 2004). She first analyses the political context in the formation of concepts of Japanese art and craft when Japan encountered Western countries in the late nineteenth century, and regards the formation as the appropriation of Orientalism. The appropriation process involved political complexity and manipulation, and reflected two factors, that is, Orientalism and Japanese cultural nationalism. She further explains that, while Japanese delegates attended various international exhibitions, they had to follow the classification of exhibits as required in the Occident, which was deemed to have the authority to define and exhibit 'Japanese art'. From High Victorian Japonisme to continental European Japonisme during the period from the 1860s to the 1880s, the criteria were predominantly based on the prevailing assumption that Japan had no fine art but was a country of crafts (Kikuchi 2004: 88-89).

Kikuchi has examined the *mingei* (folk crafts) theory, i.e. Japan's first modern craft/design theory created in the 1920s (1997: 343). She also defines what she means by 'Oriental Orientalism': *mingei* theory developed as a means to strengthen the self identity of Japanese culture by placing Japan at the centre of an Oriental cultural map, with fine contours of cultural differences within Japan and in Asia. In Orientalism, the Orient, including Japan, was an epistemological object to be observed, studied, collected, taxonomised and preserved. Japan also repeated this cultural politicisation within the Orient, through projecting Japanese-style Orientalism translated and appropriated from western Orientalism. This is what she has glossed as Oriental Orientalism (Kikuchi 2004: 123). From this perspective, wearing western style clothing, of which the hat is part, signifies something more complicated than fashion.

Yuanli rush-woven hats, in addition to being 'Taiwanese Panama hats', were also

displayed several times in various Japanese local and national exhibitions and world exhibitions and expositions: 1897 in Nagasaki (Japan), 1898 in Korea, 1903 in Osaka (Japan), 1904 in St. Louis (the United States), 1907 in Tokyo (Japan), to mention a few (Lu 2005). A Taiwanese historian, Shao-li Lu, points out that by holding these exhibitions and expositions, Japan was striving for recognition from western countries and their investment in Japan and Taiwan, and to show the result of its colonial administration of Taiwan. On all of these occasions, Yuanli rush-weaving objects were represented by Japan as a 'local speciality'. However, what does it mean to be a 'local speciality' and how is it perceived and represented? First of all, it is about how Japanese people evaluated the plant, i.e. the material used for weaving. The material, that is, *chhioh-chhau* or Dajia rush, was regarded as a peculiar kind of plant. For instance, the rush was displayed in the 1897 Nagasaki exhibition, along with fifty-four other kinds of plants from Taiwan (Lu 2005: 103). The Japanese administration of Taiwan thought that by cultivating Dajia rush, they could obtain its good-quality fibre and therefore make Dajia rush the most profitable plant. However, from the authority's perspective, in addition to its fibre, there were no other advantages that could be obtained from the plant (Taiwan Sotokufu Minseibu Shokusanhyoku 1908: 5).

Secondly, the way in which Japanese people perceived rush-woven objects was manifested and reinforced by an event closely related to rush-weaving. In the 1903 Osaka exhibition, 'Dajia mat' and 'Dajia hat' were displayed as a 'local speciality'. At the time the Japanese Meiji Emperor and Empress, and the crown prince also visited the exhibition, and they bought Dajia hats, Dajia mats, and other Taiwanese local specialties, such as teas. These specialties also became popular among ordinary Japanese people because of being displayed at the exhibition (Lu 2005: 128-9).

However, the notion of rush as a peculiar plant containing good-quality fibre and that rush-woven mats and hats were a local speciality, was connected to the ideological theories that underpinned Japanese modernisation and the colonisation of Taiwan. '*Jihchan singye*' (promotion of industries) and '*wunming kaihua*' (civilisation) were

the two most important concepts and guidelines employed by Japan from the late nineteenth century onwards. '*Jhihchan singye*' aimed to enrich Japan, allowing it to become a member of Western society and therefore able to compete with western countries. In contrast to Japan, Taiwan was seen as an uncivilised country. Although there were rich natural resources there, such as Dajia rush, the people of Taiwan were believed to lack the wisdom to develop it. According to official Japanese thought, they had to wait for the civilised Japanese people, who had modern knowledge, to come and make use of the raw materials. Through the process of civilising Taiwan with advanced Japanese knowledge and techniques, the natural resources of Taiwan would contribute to the '*Jhihchan singye*', which would eventually be beneficial to Japan (Lu 2005: 183, 300).

Lu (2005) has illustrated how Japan displayed a Taiwanese object in an international exhibition, where the meaning and representation of the object were completely different from those of its original context. Though based on Taiwanese materials, Japan added its own historical and symbolic meanings to the object and transformed the original article into another with new uses and values (Lu 2005: 184). Drawing on this interpretation, Yuanli rush-woven objects, in a similar way, were transformed into 'Taiwanese Panama hats' from the Japanese point of view, and the objects further became a 'local speciality' of Taiwan to be displayed or purchased not only by Japanese people and people in Western countries, but also by Taiwanese people.

Hence, as Mi-cha Wu (2006) suggests, Taiwanese local specialities were 'discovered' according to the Japanese colonial perspective. In comparison with itself, Japan discovered the different characteristics of Taiwan: warmth, plentiful bright and rich colours – in other words, all things 'tropical'. The coloniser discovered the characteristics and defined 'Taiwaneseness' for the colonised people of Taiwan (Wu 2006: 166).

The Japanese colonial perspective on Taiwan, as Wu describes, contains the quality of a cross-cultural encounter, as illustrated respectively by Thomas (1991) and Cannizzo (1998), between Westerners and Pacific Islanders or Africans. Yuanli

rush-woven objects, as well as other local specialities, are the kinds of material that embody, as Cannizzo describes for Westerners and Africans, ‘the “exotic” qualities, which the colonial gaze projected on to items’ (Cannizzo 1998: 156) of Taiwanese manufacture.

The rush-woven hat and the mutual entanglement

In this section, I explore how the significance of rush-woven objects was transformed after the emergence of the rush-weaving industry. I draw on the notion of ‘entanglement’ theorised by Nicholas Thomas (1991) in order to examine the material relationship between Japan and Taiwan in the context of the colonial encounter:

The notion of entanglement aims to capture the dialectic of international inequalities and local appropriations; it energizes a perspective situated beyond the argument proponents of the view that the world system is essentially determinate of local social systems and those asserting the relative autonomy of individual groups and cultures. (Thomas 1991: 207)

Although Taiwanese material objects were not so ‘curious’ for Japanese people, as the indigenous objects were to the Europeans described by Thomas (1991: 126-129), the articles were still very much ‘exotic’ to ‘others’, such as the Japanese, as I have illustrated above. In the context of Yuanli rush-weaving, Japanese people’s use of Dajia mats is representative of the Japanese appropriation of Taiwanese objects. In my opinion, Dajia mats are regarded as Taiwanese objects, because they had been produced and used in Yuanli before Japanese colonisation. In this sense, it is very different from Japanese people’s use of Dajia hats. In other words, Dajia mats and Dajia hats belong to very different categories, which I will address in detail shortly.

In terms of Taiwanese appropriation of Japanese products, I would use the 1908 exhibition as an example. It was held, as Lu points out, to celebrate the railway as a transport service, which after thirteen years of colonisation was regarded as the most important construction to have been completed. However, the business transaction made possible by railway transportation became the focal point of the exhibition. According to Lu, it was criticised publicly in the press which pointed out that

eventually the exhibition was indeed effective in terms of exploring the potential of Japanese commodities in Taiwanese market (2005: 204-5). At the beginning the commodities displayed in the exhibition were merely for the consumption of the Japanese people who lived in Taiwan, without paying much regard to the demand of Taiwanese people and their ability to purchase. Later on it was realised that Taiwanese people's demands and purchasing power for cheap articles of daily use were fairly high. The critique also made a list of those Japanese commodities which were most popular among Taiwanese consumers, including: the dressing gown, the western-style umbrella, clogs, kimonos, 'Dajia hats', and so on (Lu 2005: 204-5). From this list, I found at least two points that are of significant interest. Taiwanese people were fond of buying goods which were very much associated with Japanese culture. More importantly, the Dajia hat was put together with other products, and was regarded as a Japanese commodity rather than a Taiwanese one. Lu does not explain why this was so but I suggest that it is the way in which Taiwanese people perceived Dajia hats at that time. My interpretation is that, although the rush was locally grown (along with other materials) and weavers made these hats in Taiwan, Taiwanese people's perception of the Dajia hat was not determined by the raw material or the makers, but by the style and the design. I argue that, if it was not for Japanese colonisation, this particular type of rush-woven hat (the Dajia hat/Taiwan Panama hat) may never have been made in Taiwan.

However, my interpretation of the Dajia hat is different from the above situation where Taiwanese people perceived the Dajia hat as a Japanese commodity. I argue that the 'Dajia hat' is a very special category of object in Yuanli rush-weaving. As a hat in the form and style of a western dress hat and therefore also called the 'gentleman's hat', it is neither the Japanese appropriation of a Taiwanese object nor vice versa. It is essentially an object resulting from the mutual entanglement of Japanese and Taiwanese people. This object is made with a Taiwanese material 'discovered' from a Japanese perspective, in the form of Japanese taste, and accomplished by Taiwanese weavers. Although Thomas notes that 'on both sides, interests in entanglement were uneven and differentiated' (Thomas 1991: 205) I argue that the Dajia hat still embodies a 'shared history' (Thomas 1991: 208).

Industrialisation and global competition

In this section, like the pervious section on the development of the rush-weaving industry in the Japanese colonial period, instead of providing an exhaustive history of the rush-weaving industry from 1945 onwards, I attempt to describe the general situation of the industry between its Japanese development and the recent revivals. By connecting the general situation in the rush-weaving industry with the broader economic transformation of Taiwanese society in this period, I argue that while the rush-weaving industry was one of those industries which the Japanese authorities wanted to develop, it has in fact been largely absent from the national economic development and industrialisation which has occurred since 1945. While the practice of rush-weaving was categorised as a sideline, and craft practice and agriculture could complement each other, craft practice tended to be sidelined in the process of industrialisation. Generally speaking, from 1945 to the 1990s, the rush-weaving industry experienced a downward trend.

The Japanese colonial rule over Taiwan was followed by the rule of the KMT. In 1945, Taiwan was given to the Republic of China (ROC); after the Chinese civil war the KMT's Republic of China retreated to Taiwan in 1949. It controlled the political, social, and economic aspects of Taiwan between 1945 and 2000 (see Introduction). In this period, the rush-weaving industry underwent a radical transformation, which was related to the broader economic transformation of Taiwanese society. According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs (2006), Taiwan's economic development from the 1940s to the present is divided into the following periods:

the 1940s	A period of economic reconstruction	The government actively promoted agricultural and industrial construction, and priority was given to the development of the textile and electric power industries.
the 1950s	The import substitution period	It was based on labour-intensive light industries. Through the exportation of agricultural products, both processed and unprocessed, Taiwan was able to earn foreign exchange.
the 1960s	A period of rapid export growth	There was rapid growth of Taiwan's exports. Initially, most export-oriented

		firms were in the food and textiles industries. Later on, it was enterprises in the electromechanical, electrical appliance and plastics industries that had the highest production value and export growth.
the 1970s	The second import substitution period	The government promoted the development of capital-intensive basic industries such as iron and steel, petrochemicals, textiles, machinery manufacturing, and auto manufacturing.
the 1980s	The emergence of Taiwan's high-tech industries	The government thus started to promote the development of strategic industries that were characterized by a high level of technology, high value added and low energy consumption. More and more small and medium enterprises in labour-intensive industries began to invest overseas.
the 1990s	A period of changing industrial structure	The Taiwanese government worked hard to improve the investment environment and foreign technology, so as to help in the upgrading of domestic industry. Taiwan gradually lost its competitive advantage in labour-intensive products with low added value. Small and medium enterprises gradually upgraded or transformed themselves so that they became more knowledge-intensive, technology-intensive and innovation-intensive.
the 2000s	A period of innovation and R&D	The arrival of the knowledge-based economy era, aided by the application of the Internet, e-commerce and IT. The government has disclosed its intention to transform Taiwan into a Green Silicon Island.

Table 4. Taiwan's economic development from the 1940s to the present

As we can see from the above table, the rush-weaving industry does not belong to the kinds of industries which are situated at the centre of the economic development led by the government since the 1940s. In terms of the development of the rush-weaving industry, I suggest that it can be divided into the pre- and post-1980s in relation to the economic transformation of Taiwanese society, and it is industrialisation and then global competition of labour force which have had most impact on the industry. Since the 1950s and 1960s, industrialisation has become the principal focus of economic development in Taiwan. This direction was manifested in the three periods of economic development and policies between the 1950s and the 1970s set up by

the central government (as shown in Table 1). In the 1980s, the business environment in Taiwan changed because wages rose and the New Taiwan dollar (Taiwanese currency) appreciated against the US dollar. Workers were hard to find, and real estate prices rose dramatically, making it difficult to find land for industrial use (Ministry of Economic Affairs 2006). Under these circumstances, merchants from the labour-intensive industries sought to set up new sites for production in foreign countries. The position occupied by the rush-weaving industry involved in this transnational development, has been addressed in the earlier section on the markets for rush-woven products.

Under the impact of industrialisation and global competition of labour, weavers were facing different situations and problems. Confronted by industrialisation, although many women went to work in the local factories, it was still possible to remain as a weaver. The problem was that the income from weaving was less than the income from being a factory worker, and a weaver's income was also less stable. It was not a problem, however, for those weavers who thought they had more freedom and a better working environment when they wove at home. However, in terms of the impact of global labour force competition, while merchants were still able to profit from selling Chinese rush-woven products in the Taiwanese market, Yuanli weavers found it hard to maintain weaving as a livelihood and needed to seek other money-generating activities, such as factory work or working in a restaurant.

A similar situation can be found in the Japanese traditional silk weaving industry in Nishijin, Kyoto (Hareven 2002). When Tamara Hareven interviewed the weavers in the 1980s, it was during Nishijin's decline. In a declining market, the weavers felt trapped with their manufacturers and had to accept the pay rates they offered and tolerate the cuts in production. Moreover, shrinking markets forced Nishijin manufacturers to hire cottage weavers in the farming and fishing villages in the Tango Peninsula along the Japan Sea, and in China and Korea, as a cheap labour force. The transfer of production of the Nishijin *obi*, the elegant and expensive sash worn over *kimino*, to labour forces situated outside Kyoto City and Japan has had a devastating impact on Nishijin weavers, who are painfully aware that they are

gradually losing their work to low-skilled and low-paid weavers in the countryside. As one Nishijin weaver observed, in fundamentally changing the Nishijin silk industry in this way, manufacturers were effectively strangulating themselves into economic suicide (Hareven 2002: 47-8).

Revivals in the past two decades

The practice of rush-weaving is predominately an economic activity and a source of livelihood for the people of Yuanli. From the Japanese colonisation to the 1960s, almost all of the adult women devoted themselves to the production of rush-weaving, which could bring a better life for the whole family. Also, young girls from seven or eight years old followed their mothers, grandmothers, relatives, and neighbours in learning how to make rush-woven objects. Because of this, almost all women in Yuanli over the age of forty know how to make rush-woven objects. However, since the 1960s, fewer and fewer people have taken up rush-weaving as a livelihood; nowadays it is only women over the age of fifty who are still making these objects.

Nevertheless, since the 1990s, there has been a revival in the practice of rush-weaving. In 2005 and 2006, when I was engaged in my fieldwork, three local organisations were actively promoting rush-weaving culture: the rush-weaving class at Jhongjheng Elementary School; the Shanjiao Community Development Association and its rush-weaving workroom; and the Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall which belongs to the Yuanli Farmer's Association. Each of these organisations has its own ideas on how to preserve or develop rush-weaving, and therefore concentrates on its own particular methods to encourage growth, as I have detailed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four. Both the rush-weaving class at Jhongjheng Elementary School and the Shanjiao Community Development Association were established in 1993, while the Shanjiao community rush-weaving workroom was initiated in 2004. The TREH, formerly a collection of rush-woven objects and related artefacts on display in a room at the headquarters of the Yuanli Farmer's Association, was set up in 1996 and was turned into a museum in 2004. Generally speaking, because of the efforts of the people in these organisations, increasing numbers of Yuanli people are

getting involved in learning about, preserving and practising rush-weaving. While some people in Yuanli have come to regard rush-weaving as a craft in terminal decline, and as ‘useless’ (see Chapter Three), there are some who are now trying to change the situation.

The meaning of rush-weaving as craft and as work

Rush-weaving as a craft has two different meanings. Firstly, weavers produce objects which are entirely handmade, from beginning to end. Hence, each product takes from between half a day to three months to make, depending on the fineness and quality of the article. Secondly, it is distinct from art (i.e. modern art and fine art) or design. There is a diversity of opinion among Yuanli people in terms of whether the contemporary development of rush-weaving should head in the direction of becoming ‘art’ or remain a craft, which is also related to the debate between design as ‘traditional’ practice or design as ‘innovation’ in weaving. Such debates have indeed emerged from the transformation of rush-weaving from an economic activity to cultural property or heritage, as will be described in this thesis. Among those in Yuanli who wanted to make rush-weaving an ‘art’, their definition of art varied, and they did not necessarily agree with each other. However, I suggest that the issue is not about ‘art versus craft’, but about different beliefs regarding creativity and ‘traditional’ craft industry; whether Yuanli weavers are creative craftswomen able to design their products, or hidebound producers of crude and old-fashioned commodities, unable to respond to changes in fashion. Despite the fact that people used the word ‘art’, they mostly referred to ‘artistic’ craft objects rather than artwork. Only in a few exceptional cases did people intend to produce rush-woven objects as artwork.

Work, identity and value

Work is a topic that Marx, Weber, and Malinowski have studied from different perspectives (see Kingsolver 1998). In the 1970s, British anthropologists debated between the work of making a living and the work of personal and group identity. In

her introduction to an edited volume of conference papers entitled *Social anthropology of work* (1979), Sandra Wallman, based on the debate, attempts to answer the question 'what is work about' and she argues that it is two processes – the management of resources and the attribution of value to those resources (Wallman 1979: 7). In terms of the management of resources, being capable of manipulating resource systems is proof of a person having control over them. Wallman suggests that it is the domain of work over which a worker has or thinks he or she has most control that becomes the focus of his or her most positive identity. However, the domain of work with which one identifies is not consistent and not predictable. In addition, the reverse to identification with one's work or aspects of one's work, is to be alienated from it. Wallman points out that either complete identification or total alienation is unlikely and that identification actually depends on the structure and the values of the society of which that work is a part.

In terms of the ascription of value, there is a relationship between time, value, and work. The social credits and debits accruing to time spent in certain types of work alter the value of that time and the value of the work. There is also a relationship between value and pride or identity. If we understand that different kinds of value are applicable to different contexts, contradictions are resolved to the extent that the context of valuation is clearly bounded and held distinct. Such contradictions are seen in those cases in which economically worthless work is personally highly valued, or socially despised jobs are a source of personal pride and identity (Wallman 1979: 10-12).

By reflecting on Marx's ideas, Raymond Firth carefully examines and illustrates the relationship between work and value, which is central to Marx's construction of a critical theory of the capitalist mode of production (Firth 1979). There are three types of value that Marx distinguished. Exchange value, or price, is what an object produced for exchange (i.e. a commodity) will fetch in the market. Use-value is what the consumer estimates the object can do to fulfil the technical function for which it was produced. Value without qualification, or the substance of value, is defined neither in monetary terms nor in terms of utility, but in terms of labour. Firth further

distinguishes work from labour, and worth from value, from the perspective of the translation of terms from German to English. According to Marx's concept, his theory is labelled in English as the 'labour-cost theory of value', because it implies pain and sacrifice. A person may gain satisfaction from work, but not so easily speak of the satisfaction to be gained from labour. In English, 'labourer' refers to a low-status occupation of little skill, but to describe someone as a 'worker' can carry the implication of a positive contribution.

The criticism that Firth has of Marx's theory is that Marx was so preoccupied with his ideas about the historical development of value as a category and its relation to the development of the idea of labour as a commodity, that his construction of development of exchange is over-simplified (Firth 1979: 199). In terms of exchange, Arjun Appadurai has devoted his very long introduction to the edited volume *The social life of things* to a discussion about the exchange of commodities. He proposes a return to a version of Engel's amendment of Marx's broad definition that involves the production of use value for others, which converges with Simmel's emphasis on exchange as the source of economic value (Appadurai 1986: 9). He argues that economic exchange is the source of value. However, Roy Dilley (2004) studies production and exchange among Senegalese craftsmen, and seeks to expand Appadurai's concept of 'regime of value' to include the relations and processes of production through which the objects are exchanged and consumed. He believes that, because it fails to recognise production as a possible source of value, the idea that exchange alone creates value is misplaced (Dilley 2004: 799).

Based on the above understanding, I attempt to explore the relationship between work, value, and identity in the Yuanli weavers' practice of rush-weaving. In my day to day conversations with Yuanli people on rush-weaving, I was impressed by their gratitude toward the rush-weaving industry. Many elderly or middle-aged women and men often told me that the industry had raised numerous Yuanli people, which I believe gives rise to their identification with rush-weaving. Certainly, this identity was not consistent, as Wallman suggested, when Yuanli people expressed their disappointment and regret on the loss of vitality of the industry, which had once been

so prosperous. This inconsistency in the way individuals identified with rush-weaving is, I suggest, related to the structure and values of the society of which the work of rush-weaving is part. Because the values of rush-weaving change in association with the economic, social, and political transformation of society, the meaning of rush-weaving as work alters. Nowadays, although the practice of rush-weaving is not economically worthless work, it is nevertheless work of low economic value. However, this economically inferior work is personally highly valued among the weavers. From a weaver's perspective, even though her income from weaving is far less satisfying than it used to be, when the money earned could raise an entire household, she can still live an independent life because of the income from rush-weaving. Because rush-weaving as work gives her this kind of control over her life, she recognises the value of the work.

Work and labour

After understanding the relationship of work, value, and identity in the practice of rush-weaving, I attempt to further examine whether rush-weaving is work or labour for weavers. In terms of the distinction between work and labour, from Marx's perspective, work is what people do because it is worthwhile, and labour is integrated into an economic circuit (see Venkatesan 2010: S167; see also Corsin-Jimenez 2003: 15). In Soumhya Venkatesan's study of the Labbai mat-weavers of Pattamadai town in South India, a weaver willingly devotes significant effort into weaving when it is considered as work, but otherwise it is regarded as labour which is completed for money.

However, Alberto Corsin-Jimenez criticises Marx's distinction between work and labour in that it does not consider the central part a job plays in imaging, shaping and mediating a person's relationship with the world. Corsin-Jimenez asserts that today's world of work is part of the way we imagine ourselves as capable moral persons, because our working arrangements can mediate our life-projects and our visions of what it means to live a good life (Corsin-Jimenez 2003: 15). I am not entirely convinced by Corsin-Jimenez's argument which is based on the experience of a single person, who is an elite worker in a top business in urban Europe, and I am not

sure to what extent I can apply his argument to my example of Yuanli in rural Taiwan. In addition, I wonder whether the meaning of living a good life is different to old people like Yuanli weavers and to young people like Lucia in Corsin-Jimenez's ethnography, and if so whether the relationship between work and living a good life would not be the same for old and young people. However, despite all the potential points of divergence, I find Corsin-Jimenez's argument that one works out one's personhood through one's labour is also applicable to the Yuanli weavers, in that for them being a producer is largely equivalent to being a person (see Chapter Four).

Returning to the question of whether rush-weaving is work or labour, I suggest that it is both work and labour for the majority of Yuanli weavers. Rush-weaving is labour in that a weaver takes rush-weaving as livelihood in order to earn money for subsistence, which is an economic consideration. In this sense, the practice of rush-weaving involves pain and sacrifice (see Chapters Three and Four). Meanwhile, rush-weaving is work for weavers because they really enjoy, despite suffering, the process or the result of making rush-woven objects and thus are willing to invest effort into it. I will return to the discussion on the meaning of rush-weaving as labour and as work to Yuanli weavers, at the end of Chapter Four.

Conclusion

Nowadays Yuanli weavers are only a small group of people, but they have chosen to practise rush-weaving for various reasons and they have different living conditions. Weavers were more similar to each other in that they first became producers of rush-woven products when they were young due to the economic conditions of the household. However, the current economic condition of most weavers' households is different when compared with the past, and in most cases much improved. Hence, this prompts me to question why these women still want to practise rush-weaving when it is no longer necessary for them to do so. If a woman works as a weaver out of economic necessity, why does she not choose another job which will provide a better income? If she simply prefers weaving as her work, why does not she choose other jobs which are less demanding than rush-weaving, especially in terms of the

physical demands of weaving for middle-aged and elderly women? These are the questions that I attempt to answer at the end of this thesis, in Chapter Four. In the next chapter, I will move on from the description of the economic and social structure to the ethnographic details, and from explaining why the weavers weave to how they weave and what is necessary to complete their work.

Chapter Two

***Chhiu-lo*: a weaver's practice of rush-weaving**

At the time I first visited Ang-khi in her house, she was a senior weaver and almost eighty years old, making rush-woven objects as a subsistence activity. When I arrived, she was sitting weaving on the ground in her living room. It was a relatively sunny afternoon, but it was very dark in the room. However, she did not turn on the light, which I presumed was because she wanted to save some money, and in the dim light I could hardly make out the texture of the object that she was making. Nevertheless, it seemed that lack of light was not a problem for her and she continued to weave as we talked. The image, working conditions, and living situation of Ang-khi were representative of almost all of the Yuanli weavers.

In this chapter, I examine in detail the process by which rush-woven objects are made in order to understand the meanings attributed to the production of rush-weaving. I examine the relationship between the characteristics of the material, the beauty of rush-woven products, and the value and virtue of weaving. I argue that, initially, it is the special characteristics of rush that determine the ways in which weavers treat it in order to produce objects. Nevertheless, weaving an object is a process of interaction between the weaver and her weaving material. As the characteristics of rush changes constantly in relation to its environment, the weaver perceives both the rush material and her physical surroundings, thereby acting on the rush and completing a woven object. While a weaver always combines her knowledge and skill of weaving in order to make each and every product beautiful, her personality is also integrated into the making. I argue that *chhiu-lo*, that is, each weaver's distinctive kind of dexterity, is the connection between an object and its maker. *Chhiu-lo* is embedded in the object, and the object is the embodiment of *chhiu-lo*. Thereby, the object represents the weaver and she is reflected in the object.

As Francesca Bray argues in her study of everyday technologies, ‘the most important work that technologies do is to produce people: the makers are shaped by the making, and the users shaped by the using’ (1997: 15-6). In addition, as Christopher Tilley argues, material culture studies are concerned with ‘deepening our insight into how persons make things and things make persons’ (2006: 2). Following the above concerns, I explore the relationship between people and things embedded in the process of rush-weaving production.

In contemporary society, most goods are mass-produced industrial products rather than handmade objects. As Daniel Miller suggests, the purpose of studying material culture and mass consumption is ‘to investigate the relationship between society and material culture, and to assess the consequences of the enormous increase in industrial production over the last century’ (1987: 3). It is true that nowadays industrial production and mass consumption play an important role in people’s everyday life. However, I try to answer the same question from the opposite perspective. Through my work with Yuanli weavers, I look at how handmade and craft production can be understood in a world seemingly permeated by mass consumption. Why do these women continue to make rush-woven objects despite the fact that mass-produced articles are everywhere? How do they actually practice their craft? What is embedded in the production that is not always visible to outsiders?

There is no specific term, either in the Taiwanese Holo language or in Mandarin, to refer to the group of people whose lifetime occupation is rush-weaving. These weavers are referred to, depending on the various contexts, by different terms. They are often called ‘*lukang*’, a Taiwanese Holo term which means ‘female labourers’, by merchants in the rush-weaving industry. Or they are described as *cho leh-a chhau-chhioh e lang*, i.e. people who make rush-woven hats and mats, in the Holo language. They are also called ‘*a-sang*’ (a middle-aged or elderly woman, in Holo) or ‘*shecyumama*’ (literally ‘community mother’, in Mandarin).¹ However, the absence of a specific descriptive term does not alter the fact that there is such a group of

¹ *Shecyumama* is the term used by the staff in the Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall (TREH) in referring to those weavers who lived in the neighbourhood and frequently came to the TREH as volunteers, performers, or teachers of weaving.

weavers who have spent almost their whole lives making rush-woven objects.

Commodities made from the natural material

Rush-woven objects are made, for the most part, for practical use in people's daily lives. As such, their function is to provide the sensation of coolness, due to the characteristics of the material from which the products are made. As detailed in Chapter One, although historically various kinds of materials have been used in the development of the industry, these days it is mainly one material in particular – the rush – which is used. As such, we can now define the rush-woven object as a commodity made from a natural material.

The material used is a particular kind of rush which weavers usually called '*chhioh-chhau*'. The characteristics of the rush, and how they have determined the way in which rush-woven objects are produced, will be detailed in this chapter, forming its main focus. Recently anthropologists and archaeologists have debated the issue of materials against materiality. Some argue that a concept of materiality is a useful way of understanding the conjunction of the social and the material (e.g. Miller 2005a, 2007; Tilley 2004, 2007; Knappett 2007), whereas others, such as Tim Ingold (2000, 2007a, 2007b), assert that working practically with materials provides a more powerful way of discovery than an approach bent on the abstract analysis of things already made (Ingold 2007a: 3).

In terms of social anthropology, while Daniel Miller and Christopher Tilley, among others, support the concept of materiality and have attempted to establish a theory of materiality, the meaning of 'materiality' has not been defined sufficiently clearly (see Introduction). Instead, Tim Ingold, arguing against the idea of materiality, suggests that the materiality of objects can be regarded as "what makes things 'thingly'" (Ingold 2007a: 9). By 'materials', Ingold means the stuff that things are made of, such as stone, wood, fibres and threads. To study materials and the properties of materials is to learn about the material composition of the inhabited world. This approach allows us to include everything, rather than leave out some things, in the inhabited world (Ingold 2007a).

In addition to his emphasis on ‘materials’, more importantly, Ingold focuses on ‘the properties of materials’ and further argues that the properties of materials are processual and relational rather than fixed attributes of matter. This is because the relationship between an object and its environment always influences the object and therefore needs to be taken into consideration. In order to analyse the way in which an object is involved in its surroundings, he distinguishes three components of the inhabited environment: medium, substances and surfaces. The ‘medium’ affords movement and perception, ‘substances’ are all kinds of more or less solid stuff, and ‘surface’ is the interface between the medium and substances. He uses a stone as example to explain the relationship between the three. Because the substance of the stone must exist in a medium of some kind, it is not possible at all that its stoniness can be understood apart from the ways it is caught up in the interchanges across its surface, between substance and medium. Thus he argues that stoniness is neither in the stone’s ‘nature’, in its materiality, nor merely in the mind of the observer or practitioner. Rather, it emerges through the stone’s engagement in its total surroundings and from the manifold ways in which it is involved in the currents of the lifeworld (Ingold 2007a: 15).

In my research on Yuanli rush-weaving, I have found that the study of the properties of materials is of greater relevance in seeking to understand the production process of rush-woven objects. I will explain later why the concept of materiality is not useful in this instance, but will first illustrate what can be found by drawing on Ingold’s viewpoint. Rush is selected for weaving not because it has certain social or symbolic meanings, but because of its characteristics, notably, those characteristics which allow the finished object to function in a particular way. Thus, rush is important to production because of its special properties. Furthermore, rush, paper (pulp twine), or cypress shred can all be used in weaving, but this does not mean that they are all the same in terms of the weaving process or the woven objects. The ways in which they are worked are different, and the feel of the products is different too. These differences are all due to the properties of the respective materials and in relation to their environment. Hence, if I only examine rush but do not pay attention

to the characteristics of the material, I will be unable to differentiate between rush-woven and non-rush woven products, or to understand why a weaver might make efforts to work with rush in particular. By examining the properties of rush carefully, I am able to understand how these properties are related to the surrounding environment.

At a more contextual level, there are significant differences between my research on Yuanli rush-weaving and those of 'materiality' in material culture studies, and that is why the concept of materiality is not appropriate to this research. First of all, rather than simply looking at the use of certain objects, I examine the way in which certain kinds of objects are produced, how the production of objects is related to artisans' lives, and the meaning of this production as work. Thus, my focus is not consumption but production. As Francesca Bray points out in her review of the anthropology of technoscience and material culture studies, material culture studies prioritise meaning and identity production through the social processes of consumption (2007: 46). Tim Ingold also tells us that studies of so-called material culture have focused overwhelmingly on processes of consumption rather than production, and the very notion of material culture is based on the belief that material culture is the embodiment of mental representations (Ingold 2007a: 5, 9). But in this chapter, using the example of Yuanli rush-weaving, I want to highlight the production and work end of the artefact's 'social life', and to focus on the place of material in the shaping of meaning and identity production for the 'producers/makers', a crucial dimension that is often omitted in current studies of material culture. In addition, the production of rush-woven objects is not simply the embodiment of mental representations of weavers, but is the constant interaction between weavers and their environment. Production is transformed according to changes in the environment of production, and thus weavers always need to react to these changes when making objects.

Secondly, I disagree with the emphasis which Daniel Miller and Christopher Tilley both lay on 'social' relations or 'social' context (e.g. Miller 1987, 1994; Tilley 2007). I agree with Ingold's view that there is no line to draw or to be crossed between a

social relation with another person and an asocial relation with a thing (Ingold 2007b: 31). A Yuanli weaver's interaction with rush is part of her work and an important part of her life, both of which are crucial and central to her relations with other people. Besides, I also wish to emphasise the environment and the long term perspective (Ingold 2007b: 34). It is necessary to consider the long term perspective in order to understand what is not immediately visible and embedded in the whole process of the production of object, including how the properties of rush have changed and what kind of knowledge and skill a weaver needs. All of these will be explained in detail in this chapter.

My analysis of materials as well as the properties of the material in this chapter is based on Tim Ingold's point but I wish to expand it further and explore the two-way relationship, that is, the interplay between the weaver and the material. In other words, not only are the object and its properties influenced by the surroundings, including both the environment and the weaver, but also the properties of the object itself influence and change the weaver. This is further related to how a weaver is shaped by weaving, which will be detailed at the end of this chapter.

The properties of the material – dry or wet

In this section I describe the various properties of rush, particularly in relation to its condition of dryness and wetness. Despite the fact that the appearance of every object, no matter what material it is made from, including plastic, cloth, or even metal, will change over time, objects made from natural materials tend to be more changeable by comparison. Because *chhioh chhau* retains its natural state when it is used in weaving, it is constantly changing as time passes and in relation to its environment. The words of one informant, Hui-hun, perfectly describe the situation:

An object, as it's used over time, definitely becomes darker and worn. But this is the life of an object made from rush. Plastic would never have this kind of life; it's dead.

I found that rush ages over time, as manifested in its transformation from white to dark in terms of colour, thinning or even snapping due to wear and tear, and change from pliable to brittle in terms of texture. As Hui-hun's words have shown, the colour

of the rush and rush-woven objects changes over time. The rush is green in colour when it is fresh or just after harvest. Gradually it turns yellowish, ivory, or light brown when it loses its moisture, especially after being dried in the sun. Drying in the sun for a longer period of time, the rush becomes less and less green and eventually turns red, that is, the red colour emerges from the brown. After making her objects, a weaver usually sends them to a processor, who uses sulphur to whiten them. Objects are whitened for two reasons: practitioners in the rush-weaving industry believe that products are prettier after this treatment, and whilst the smell of the sulphur can prevent insects, the treatment also prevents mildew. However, even though it has been smoked by sulphur, the rush-woven object retains the quality of the rush as a natural material and therefore gradually turns to dark brown, so long as the object is used and exposed to the air. Yuanli people usually refer to the colour as 'black', comparing it to the 'white' colour of newly made products. A dark object can be treated by being smoked in sulphur, a process through which it will whiten again, though not as 'white' as it used to be. It seems to me that the changeable colour of the object shows that the rush continues to change even after it is harvested and used in weaving, and that the rush-woven object is as alive as the rush plant in the field.

The most critical quality of rush as it relates to weaving, I found, was the constant change between dry and wet, and how these changes determined how the weaver worked with the rush. In texture the stem of the rush is sponge-like, allowing ventilation and the absorption of liquid, such as human sweat or moisture from the air. The ability to absorb sweat is the reason why rush-woven objects can offer the feeling of coolness. Several informants expressed exactly the same opinion about this. For instance, Ong, an export merchant, said to me:

People who sleep on rush-mats will not suffer from hypertension, and those who use rush-woven insoles will avoid athlete's foot. It's a wonderful moment, when I lie down on my rush-mat bed! A bamboo-mat or a rattan-mat does not absorb sweat.

Chiong, an ex-merchant in the rush-weaving industry, also expressed similar feelings:

Lying on rush-mat makes me feel so cool in summer. We still use it now; we can't fall asleep without it. It absorbs sweat, so I don't feel soaked and sticky. It's an excellent material!

Te, in charge of processing and a senior practitioner of the industry, said:

Rush-mats used to be very valuable, and I never used them. I only make them you

see. I can't afford to use them as they're too expensive a luxury to use. My son bought one for my grandson, but my grandson didn't use it. Later he gave it to me, so I sleep on it now. It's so comfortable!

Rush-woven objects are called '*natsumono*' in the Japanese language. I learned this from Ong, a rush-weaving merchant who traded mainly with Japanese companies. *Natsumono* literally means 'summer objects', that is, articles used in summer, especially clothes, including hats, sandals, parasols and so on. Taiwanese rush-woven products are available on the Japanese market between mid-June (early July) and the end of September. In other words, rush-woven products, such as hats and mats, are seasonal produce and are popular in hot weather, such as the Japanese summer. However, the ability to absorb liquid is not always as beneficial as described above. Sometimes the rush retains too much moisture and becomes defective, with mildew growing on the surface of the rush and rush-woven objects. In summary, while dry rush can absorb sweat and is therefore beneficial, wet rush can encourage mildew growth which is, of course, a disadvantage.

It is interesting to note that dry is not always good and wet is not always bad. It all depends on the situation. The second situation, which also relates to the quality of dryness and wetness of the rush, is exactly opposite to the above. Wet rush is pliable, that is, soft but strong, whereas dry rush is brittle, that is, rigid but fragile. Hence, in this pairing of characteristics, dryness, and thereby brittleness, is a shortcoming, especially in the process of weaving, whereas wetness, and, thereby the pliability of the rush, is more convenient for working. A third pair of characteristics relating to dryness and wetness relates to the smell of the rush. Green rush just harvested from the field, and still fresh, is not fragrant because the light and pleasant smell only exists after the rush has been dried in the sun. Once the rush or the rush-woven object has been dried in the sun, and if it is kept in a relatively dry environment, its fragrance will last for years. As Ong described from his own experience, "as long as the mat has been dried in the sun for enough time and is put in a big plastic bag for storage, it still smells good a year later when I take it out". Thus it appears that the fragrance created through exposure of the rush to the sun is well preserved in the plastic bag.

The process of sun drying is central to the qualities of dryness and wetness, being a way of turning wet rush and products dry again and again. As such, sunlight produces a material transformation in the rush. Before drying in the sun, the rush, which contains water, is soft and tough, whereas after being exposed to the sun, the rush becomes dry, rigid and brittle. In other words, a piece of rush, which retains a lot of water, can become completely dry again after drying in the sun for thirty minutes or several hours, depending on how intense the sunlight is. That is why Yuanli people who understand this characteristic emphasise the importance of careful maintenance. In addition, through maintenance, mildew can be avoided. As Ong carefully explained:

In using a rush-woven bed mat, one has to know how to take good care of it. If sweat soaks into the mat while sleeping, move it outside and have it dried in the sun for one to two hours, where possible. Basic maintenance includes: first, drying in the sun; second, after drying in the sun, do not fold it or it will break immediately. Rush is very brittle after being in the sun, so let it cool down for a while. In addition, if there is mildew, the following steps should be taken: firstly, have the mat dried in the sun; secondly, brush the mildew off gently; thirdly, wipe the mat with a moist cloth; fourthly, have it dried in the sun again for another half hour and then take it out of the sun to cool down. Generally speaking, every now and then, when the sunlight is available, have the mat dried in the sun for even just half an hour and no more mildew will grow.

Hence, drying in the sun can effect a repeated change in state in rush products, from wet to dry, with rush-woven objects able to absorb sweat not only once but an almost unlimited number of times. It is this characteristic which gives those who understand its properties so much enjoyment in the product.

I have shown how much the sun can change the properties of rush, but various weather conditions, including sun, rain and wind, all affect rush and thereby the practice of rush-weaving. First of all, the relationship between the sun and the qualities of rush is manifold and complex. As shown above, rush-woven products as ‘summer objects’ are useful, to a large extent, because people crave the coolness they provide during the intense heat of summer. In this sense, rush-woven objects are a protective tool against the fierce heat of the sun. Indeed, rush-woven objects are ‘sunny-day articles’, that is, the rush needs sunshine in various ways. Rush has to be harvested on sunny days so that it is of good quality. The rush needs to be dried in

the sun so that it can be stored and is fragrant. In addition, in business terms, rush-woven products tend to be sold, and more successfully, on sunny days: customers often find it necessary to purchase rush-woven products when it is sunny. Indeed, the rain detracts from sales, makes the objects wet, and even encourages mildew growth.

During my fieldwork I experienced first hand the ways in which rain can influence the condition of rush and how people perceived the rain precisely due to the effect it had on rush. During the rainy season, which started in March that year, I became as anxious as those working in the rush-weaving industry. As I recorded in my fieldnotes:

The rain has not stopped for a whole week. It has rained almost every day, heavy or light, and over time I have started to make the connection between the weather and the rush-weaving business. Because it has rained, Jiang cancelled the visit she had scheduled to talk to new customers about the business, as she was convinced that the business wouldn't be successful if she went on such a rainy day. It was not superstitions, but a decision based on her long-term experience in the industry. Also, it would have been inconvenient for her to get stock in or out on a rainy day, as the goods might have got wet, which would've been troublesome. In addition, because of the rain, business has been quiet in the shop in the Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall. Visitors come for the exhibitions but seldom buy rush-woven products on rainy days. Last night I even prayed that we would have good weather today. So rush-woven objects are not only seasonal commodities, that is, articles for hot weather in summer, but they are also goods very much associated with various weather conditions – rainy days are not good for selling and establishing new business. Therefore it is a summer and sunny-day commodity.

Although summer is the high season of the industry, rush-woven objects are made throughout the year, including the rainy season. When the rain continues without stopping for several days or even several weeks, rush farmers start to worry whether it will damage the rush growing in the field. If the rush plant collapses and decays, it can no longer be harvested and becomes useless as well as worthless. Meanwhile, weavers worry whether there will be a shortage of rush for the season or the year, as rain can both reduce the future harvest and cause the harvested rush, which is kept in the rush shop storeroom, to develop mildew.

The wind has an impact on the quality of rush, too, and it is also associated with wetness and dryness. When I was doing fieldwork, the first time I felt the 'texture' of the wind, and a sudden change in 'texture', was not while weaving indoors, but when

farming outdoors. As I recorded in my fieldnotes:

I am learning to farm from my master farmer, Chiong Chhi-liong. Today was my first day of practising farming in the field. I was standing in the paddy field and working with other farmers. In the morning it was breezy and warm. By noon, though, the distant sky suddenly became dark, and it got much colder. Chiong kept working and said to everyone, “the north wind blows”.

Because I grew up in urban Taiwan and do not possess the kind of knowledge and sensitivity that master farmer Chiong has, I was surprised and impressed by his ability. In Yuanli, as well as other parts of Taiwan, in summer, the wind comes from the south and is wet. By contrast, in winter, a dry wind blows from the north. The north wind makes the rush dry, rigid and brittle, and therefore easily broken. Weavers therefore avoid travelling with rush, for instance when they attend weaving classes and go between the class and home, as it may break easily on the journey. I came to understand the influence that the north wind has on rush when I visited a group of weavers in a weaving class in December. I wrote down my experience in my fieldnotes:

There is a weaving class for elderly people, for entertainment and socialising, in the local community, held in a classroom of an elementary school. When I arrived at the classroom, however, the elderly women and the class teacher were not weaving. Instead, they were singing songs. The teacher told me that it was because of the weather. Once the [winter] wind starts to blow, they do not bring the rush from home to weave here, as it might break, so they just weave at home. They will not weave together in class again until the weather gets warmer, probably next March.

For the same reason, when making objects in winter, a weaver has to spray water on the rush more frequently during the weaving process, to keep the rush moisturised, so it does not break and the quality of the products can be maintained. In contrast, in the summer, when a warm, moist wind comes from the south, rather than worrying about brittle and easily broken rush, weavers will worry whether mildew will grow on the rush if it is too wet.

A weaver who comes into contact with rush on a daily basis, knows best how the wind acts on it. I heard the following comments from a senior weaver:

I joined the weavers to attend a training class held by the Shanjiao community association.² In the class, the teacher wanted everyone to do some brainstorming

² It was a local organisation that devoted itself to the promotion of contemporary rush-weaving. See Introduction for details.

on how to innovative in creating rush-woven products, in addition to the existing ones. However, one of the more senior weavers was more interested in discussing how “rush-woven objects can easily develop mildew on them. If the wind from the south blows, it’s a wet wind, and mildew grows”.

I suppose what this senior weaver wanted to express is that, when one thinks about innovative designs, it is necessary to take into consideration the characteristics of rush and how it is easily influenced by moisture in the surrounding environment. One should be aware of such limitations, which, if they cannot be overcome, may cause the growth of mildew.

Nevertheless, it is not merely the north and south wind which have an impact on the properties of rush: there is a third kind of wind. As Low and Hsu have described, wind may be thought of as a ‘natural phenomenon’, that is, ‘air in motion’. Yet wind is also experienced indoors, in the form of ‘drafts’ and ‘currents of air’ (Low and Hsu 2007: 1). It is exactly these ‘currents of air’ which have as much, if not more, influence than the north and south wind, because, though these air currents are much less tangible, they are more persistent than the wind. Air currents influence both the use of rush-woven objects and the practice of weaving, usually due to the moisture contained in the air. As Khu, who runs a hat-and-mat shop with her husband and mother-in-law, told me, “when it is too wet and the air contains too much moisture, one should close the window if there are rush-woven objects indoors”. This is to stop the wet air from outside getting in, in order not to damage the rush-woven objects in the room. For the same reason, Khu continued, “a rush-woven bed mat, which has been in the making for a long time,³ cannot be beautiful, as it is continuously exposed to the air”. What she indicated is that there is inevitably moisture, to a greater or lesser degree, in the air. Because of the ability of the rush to absorb moisture in the air, the longer the rush-woven object is exposed to the air, the more water it retains. In so doing, the colour and the fragrance of the rush are no longer the same as those of an article which is finished in a short period of time, even if the former is dried in the sun. Hence, both weavers and users tend to prevent rush-woven objects from being over exposed to wet air, as they do not want them to become less beautiful or to develop mildew. In addition, objects are kept in plastic bags for

³ Meaning an article which, because the weaving is subject to interruption, is not worked on continuously till completed.

storage after drying in the sun.

The properties of rush and the perception of the environment

If it were not for the characteristics of *chhioh-chhau*, a plant which has the extraordinary ability to absorb liquid repeatedly, rush-woven products would not necessarily be in demand, nor would they be popular commodities which have been produced for decades. However, it is exactly due to this characteristic that the rush is easily influenced by and its properties always changing in relation to, its environment. Hence, a weaver who uses *chhioh-chhau* in making objects needs both a thorough understanding of the properties of rush and a developed knowledge of the effects which may arise from changes in weather conditions. A weaver always combines this understanding and perception in her practice of weaving. I found that at the beginning it is the properties of rush that prompt a weaver to treat the rush in a particular way. However, the process of weaving is by necessity a series of actions carried out by the weaver in order to change the properties of the rush, in order to meet different needs at each stage of weaving and thereby produce the desired object.

The process of a weaver's work can generally be divided into three phases: preparation before weaving, making an object, and the arrangement after weaving. First of all, the weaver has to buy the material for weaving from the rush shop, where she selects the rush according to her intended production. The major consideration is the length of the rush. After buying the rush, the weaver needs to decide whether dyeing the rush is required. If it is necessary, she sends the rush to the dyer and lets him dye the material in various colours.

In addition, the rush should be dried in the sun, no matter if it is going to be used soon or stored for later use. The rush that a weaver buys from the rush shop is already dried in the sun. However, sometimes it is not completely dry but still contains some moisture. Drying in the sun avoids the threat of mildew ruining the rush, as well making the colour of the rush more attractive. From beginning to end, the rush or the rush-woven object has to be dried in the sun several times. This does not mean, though, that the material or the object can be dried in the sun at any point

of the process, as the result will not be the same. The timing actually makes a crucial difference. The change of colour of the rush is a good example. While the rush is not completely dry, its colour is not so much brown but rather slightly green. In this situation, the green rush can be picked out and dried in the sun for a longer period of time than the brown one, in order to ensure that each piece of rush matches in colour as far as possible. This is related to one of the standards of beauty held by the weaver, that is, the 'evenness', a matter which I shall address in the next section. However, if the green rush is not picked out beforehand but is used in weaving together with other colours, the resulting object, created from the interweaving of both the brown and green rush, cannot afterwards be changed. Thus, when the whole object is dried in the sun after it is finished, the brown part will always become darker than the green one, and the beauty of even colour cannot be achieved. This is why a weaver always dries the rush carefully after buying it from the shop or before using it to make objects.

Before moving on to making an object, the last thing a weaver needs to do is to manipulate the rush. Before each production, a weaver selects suitable rushes from her storage, in terms of length, degree of thickness, and hardness or softness of rush. In order to make a fine product, she needs to split each single piece of rush into several thinner pieces by using a needle. Following that, she moistens the rush with water, softens the rush by using a wooden hammer, and sometimes rubs the rush to adjust the shape, until it is ready for weaving.

The second phase, i.e. the production of the object, can now start. Most of the time a weaver will sit on the ground whilst weaving. First of all she spreads the manipulated rush, according to which article is being made. The ways of arranging the rush for making a mat, a hat and a handbag are all different. For instance, if she is making a mat, she uses a bamboo pole, which is split in half and tied together by a cotton string at both ends, to fix the hundreds of pieces of rush, which are lying next to each other, in order. After arranging the rush, one after another, she weaves the beginning section, the pattern section (if plain) or the forming of shape (if solid), and the ending section, all of which need different techniques and different amounts of rush

respectively. Apart from weaving the main body, she adds decoration every now and then. The final stage of weaving is the arrangement after production. During the process of production water is applied to the article in order to keep the rush moisturised and soft, and to make the weaving easier. Again, the finished article, whether either for storage or for sale, ought to be dried in the sun to prevent mildew from growing.

In the process of weaving an object, the properties of the rush are changed in various ways during each stage. First of all, when the weaver dries the rush in the sun for storage, and in order to make the colours match each other before weaving, the rush changes from wet to dry and is thereby transformed from a newly-harvested plant into a material fit for weaving. As the weaver splits the rush in order to make finer products, the rush changes from being hard to soft, and from being thick to being thin. As soon as the weaver dampens the rush in order for it to absorb water and soften like a plant, the rigid and dry rush becomes wet and soft. Nevertheless, it is still necessary for the weaver to hit the rush with a wooden hammer, in order to make it even softer and to change its shape from triangular to flat. Some objects are made with flat rush, whereas others are woven from round rush. Therefore, a weaver sometimes rubs the flat rush in her palms to make it round. Throughout the weaving process, the weaver keeps the rush moisturised by applying appropriate amounts of water every so often, as the rush may break because of either too little or too much water. Finally, when the weaver dries the finished object in the sun, the rush changes from wet to dry again. The object is dry and hard, but not as hard as it used to be, as the rush has been split, hammered and woven.

By effecting these changes to the quality of the rush material, a rush-woven article is created, born from the weaver's understanding of the nature of the rush and her ability to perceive the changes in her environment, especially the various weather conditions. The process of making an object lasts from several hours to several days or even months. During this period the conditions of the weaver's environment can change significantly the properties of the rush, and as such the weaver always needs to be sensitive to these changes. Weavers make objects in both summer and winter. It

is very hot in summer, and the high temperature can make the damp rush dry easily. Weavers avoid using air conditioners but need an electric fan to keep the room cool. However, the fan also makes the rush dry out more easily. In winter, the wind, unlike the summer wind that contains moisture, makes the damp rush dry easily too. In order to keep the rush damp, pliable and unbroken during the weaving process, every weaver has her own equipment, including a sprayer, a cup of water, pieces of damp cloth, and pieces of damp newspaper. She spreads the damp newspaper on the ground, on which she lays the rush and weaves. She constantly sprays a little water on the rush, dampens her fingertips and the rush with the water in the cup, and covers the rush with a damp cloth.

However, sometimes the opposite situation occurs. On humid days, everything inside the house can become moist very quickly and in this situation the weaver will close the windows to avoid the moist air, which can make the rush too wet. In addition, in the rainy season or on cloudy days, once a weaver sees the sun appear, she will immediately bring the rush and objects out into the sun.

To keep the wet-dry balance of the rush, it is important to apply the correct amount of water. In the very early stages of my apprenticeship in rush-weaving, I found it extremely difficult to control accurately the amount of water that I applied to the rush. On one occasion, I applied too much water and the rush started to expand. However, I was not experienced enough to realise the difference and kept on weaving. Later, when the rush was getting dry, many holes appeared between each piece of rush, revealing obvious mistakes to my master when she examined my mat. Afterwards, still struggling with the method, I again sprayed on too much water. However, I later realised the mistake myself, which was, in a way, an improvement. Even though I tried to make up for the defect by pulling each piece of rush, hoping to make the holes disappear, in the end the mat still looked different to the one that was made in the proper way. So my master weaver once again found the problem in my work. In this case, if an object is woven in the proper way, the pieces of rush come together automatically, and the object is naturally flat and beautiful. This beauty cannot be obtained by pulling the pieces of rush altogether at the end of the process. From this

experience, I realised how beauty matters to a weaver and how difficult it is to achieve. It is this issue that I will turn to now.

Making beautiful objects

In the process of making a rush-woven object, a weaver endeavours to understand the properties of the rush, perceive the weather conditions, change the qualities of the material, and finally weave the article, as has been described above. All of these efforts are made in order to produce pieces of work that meet functional requirements but are also beautiful. Before I explore what constitutes a properly made rush-woven article and what the particular standards of beauty are, I will look first at how the weaver achieves the goal of producing beautiful objects. I closely examine a weaver's daily schedule in order to show that weaving is integrated into, rather than separated from, the weaver's everyday life, and how the weaver has to deal with various things which are all related to being a weaver by profession. In addition, her annual schedule is arranged in relation to the boom and slack seasons of the rush-weaving industry.

A daily schedule of a weaver⁴

Siu-khim was my master weaver, with whom I worked as an apprentice of rush-weaving.⁵ She was in her fifties and worked as a weaver by profession. I met her through the museum staff in the Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall (hereafter TREH), where she sold her products to the museum shop and sometimes worked as a teacher and performer of weaving. Siu-khim's daily life, including her work inside and outside of the home, is described in detail. I came to understand Siu-khim's daily schedule, mostly through working under her as an apprentice and following her to several events, but also through her explanations of her work as we were weaving

⁴ I use the present tense to describe things that Siu-khim does on a day-to-day or regular basis, whereas I use the past tense to illustrate particular events or occasions.

⁵ I always visited her house to learn weaving. I did not have the opportunity to live with her during my fieldwork.

together in her living room.



My master weaver working in her 'studio'/sitting room

4.30-5 a.m.

Siu-khim always wakes up around this time.

5.30-7 a.m.

Twice a week, Siu-khim attends the folk dance class held by the community association, in the playground of an elementary school which is just a two-minute walk from her house. She loves the class, where she always has a pleasant time with her female friends, although she always finds it difficult to remember the dance steps, in contrast to her excellent memory for weaving. When there is no class, Siu-khim washes her clothes and pots in the stream. Siu-khim's house is on the roadside, and the stream is located across the road and down some steps. Usually Siu-khim also goes to her field, which is to the left of her house, to water the vegetables and fruits that she grows. She used to keep pigs and chickens when she had a big family, but now she lives alone and it is no longer necessary.

7-7.30 a.m.

Siu-khim always has her breakfast at home. Usually it is a bowl of rice or rice porridge with yesterday's leftover dishes.

7.30 a.m.

It is about time to start weaving. She works in the living room, the first space which you come to after entering the house through the yard and then a door. Siu-khim's way of working is slightly different from day to day, depending on what kind of object she is making. When she weaves mats or handbags, she sits on the ground. If she produces tiny articles such as brooches, she sits on a wooden chair. Most mornings Siu-khim weaves alone and it is quiet, which is different to the afternoons. While weaving, Siu-khim likes listening to the radio, which broadcasts programs in the Taiwanese (Holo) language.

On beautiful days when brilliant shafts of sunlight appear through the trees in the yard, Siu-khim takes bundles of rush from a room next to the sitting room, to work with in the yard. Each bundle is tied at both ends. She unties just one side of each bundle, leaving the other side fastened, and spreads the rushes on the ground like an open fan. Several rows of these fans are laid one after the other in the yard, and the rush is dried in the sun. Also, finished products are dried together. The rush, which Siu-khim bought recently, is newly harvested and still slightly green. By drying it in the sun, Siu-khim wants to make the colour turn red.

10.30-11 a.m.

During a short break in the middle of work, Siu-khim leaves the living room and goes to the kitchen. She washes rice and puts it in an electric rice cooker. She also prepares some ingredients for lunch. Then she goes out to the yard to turn over the rush, which is still drying in the sun. It will turn too red if it is dried in the sun for too long, so she has to turn it over once or twice an hour.

11.50 a.m.

Siu-khim finishes her weaving, stands up and goes to the kitchen to prepare lunch. Usually she has rice with two or three dishes, most of which are vegetables grown in her field or given to her by her friends and relatives, such as beans, bamboo shoots,

and loofahs in summer⁶. The cooking takes her less than half an hour. After cooking, she brings the dishes into the living room, puts them on the table, and turns on the television. Although she has a big dining table in the kitchen, she prefers to have meals in the living room – the dining table is too big for her alone, and she can watch the news while eating.

After lunch, Siu-khim likes to take a walk in front of her house. If there is a lot of work to be done in the afternoon, she just walks to her field to have a look at the vegetables and fruit. If it is a pleasant afternoon, then she can go farther and have fun. She likes to go across the road in front of her house, and cross the bridge to the orchard which belongs to her relatives. She often picks ripe fruit from the trees and sits under the tree while she eats it. She believes that this is the best way to enjoy fruit. The walk is important to her, as she can relax physically, especially her eyes, which get tired from the intense work of weaving.

1 p.m.

During my time working with Siu-khim, there were several days that she was making products ordered by the Yuanli Farmer's Association. On one occasion, someone from the Farmer's Association had ordered a rush-woven basket that could wrap and carry melons, newly grown in the Love Orchard run by the Farmer's Association. The person in charge wanted to promote the fruit and the rush-woven product at the same time. The order was quite urgent, so Siu-khim tried to finish all these hundreds of baskets as soon as she could.

The melon carriers ordered by the Farmers' Association, which Siu-khim had been making over several days, were all finished before lunch one day, so Siu-khim started making another kind of object. Before weaving, she needs to prepare. First of all, she goes into a room which had once been a bedroom, since turned into a storeroom, and in which bundles of rush and finished products are kept. In this room, she carefully considers the type of rush needed for the next item to be produced, including length and texture, by carefully examining all of the rush in the room. She

⁶ The types of vegetables grown in Siu-khim's field differ depending on whether it is summer or winter.

also keeps in mind which rushes she wishes to keep back for her own work for competitions or exhibitions, or for orders which have already been placed.

The next step is to select the appropriate rush from each bundle, by distinguishing according to size (i.e. thickness or thinness) and hardness. This time her selection is done not only by sight but, more importantly, by touch, and it is by her fingertips that she can tell the difference. Sometimes a thick rush is surprisingly soft, whereas a thin one might have a hard core. The selection depends on the kind of objects that are going to be made, and sometimes splitting the rush is necessary. Splitting rushes always makes the fibre in the stem spread all over the place. Siu-khim firstly separates the useful rushes from the rest, which are either discarded or stored for later use, and then she tidies the room before going on to weave.

It is very hot and sometimes humid in the afternoon during the summer. Siu-khim usually turns on an electric fan, but she places it so that it does not blow directly onto the rushes. Several times, while Siu-khim and I enjoyed the cool breeze as we wove, she told me the story of her friend, Hong-ngo, who was also a weaver by profession. Hong-ngo suffered the heat of summer without using a fan while she worked, in order to keep the rush in good shape. However, when her grandchildren came to spend the summer vacation in her house, she turned on the fan to make sure they did not suffer in the summer heat. When she did so, the hundreds of pieces of rush with which she was working flew all over the place, turning her workplace into something resembling a chicken coop. Some of the rushes, blown about, became brittle and broken, and Hong-ngo needed to find new rushes.

When Siu-khim takes a break, once every hour or so, she stretches her body to relax. Sometimes, she goes down to the cool stream for relief from the heat, and also to rest her eyes. On returning to the house to work, neighbours, relatives, or friends often drop in for a chat. Siu-khim enjoys talking with them, and continues to work proficiently as she does so, without pause or detriment to the quality of her work. Chatting and weaving at the same time is not a problem, as her skill is sufficient to continue working even when there are distractions.

6.30 p.m.

Siu-khim leaves the living room and prepares dinner in the kitchen. She usually has dinner around 7 p.m., eating while she watches the evening news on the television. After the meal, she visits a friend or neighbour for a chat, which she loves doing. Riding a motorcycle, it takes only five to ten minutes to get to where they live. Sometimes friends and relatives come to her house instead. However, if too much work is left unfinished, she continues weaving after dinner. She turns on the ceiling light to make the room bright, and in so doing the texture of the rush-woven object is clearly visible. However, her sight gets worse in the evening, and she usually wears glasses to aid her near vision. While weaving at night, Siu-khim turns on the television, to watch a soap opera in the Taiwanese Holo language. Every so often, her sight moves from the object she is making to the television, and back.

While cooking dinner, Siu-khim went to the yard to pick some garden balsam, not for the dishes but for her finger. She had inflammation in a fingernail, which had become reddened and painful. The pain almost made Siu-khim unable to weave anymore. However, she could not rest because she had to finish a certain amount of products before tomorrow. In order to continue her work, she applied the juice of the garden balsam to her fingernail, wrapped it, and continued to weave.

10.30 p.m.

No more work after this time. After weaving for the whole day, Siu-khim's eyes and body are tired. She takes a shower and then goes to bed around 11p.m. It is cool and breezy during the night even though it is summer, as the house is on a hill and close to a stream. Air conditioning is not necessary for Siu-khim.

What I have shown above is an average working day in the life of a master weaver. However, every so often, as we worked together, her work would take her outside of the usual home environment. As a rush-weaving apprentice, I not only learned weaving from my master weaver, but also learned how to purchase the materials for

weaving. On a number of occasions, I accompanied Siu-khim as she carried out various errands outside her home. The first was to deliver some products which had been ordered. Siu-khim prefers to deliver them early in the morning, around 8 a.m. In particular, Siu-khim had established an unusually strong and productive relationship with the museum shop at the TREH, linking production and sales. As Siu-khim told me:

Hui-hun [the main staff member of the TREH] and I are in the same boat. If her situation is good [i.e. sales are doing well], my situation will be good, too. So I always think about what objects to make. For example, I try to take into account what sort of items will sell best, such as small items rather than large.⁷ I would keep a mental tally of what had sold well, and then make some more in advance, even if Hui-hun hasn't given me the order. Also I have noticed that sales are high during the weekends, so I try to make as many objects as I can in order to offer them for the sale at those times.

So when Siu-khim brings products to the museum shop, she also examines the displays to see what has been sold and what is left. Hui-hun, the person in charge of buying products from weavers, pays Siu-khim in cash for her articles and asks her to sign a receipt. Sometimes Hui-hun uses this opportunity to ask Siu-khim to make more products; otherwise she calls Siu-khim in order to place an order.

After leaving the museum shop, Siu-khim needed to go to the market in the town centre, close to the train station. There were two markets in town. Siu-khim's house was closer to the smaller one, but it still took ten minutes if she rode her motorcycle. The bigger one, the one we were going to, was farther and it took another ten minutes to get there. As a result Siu-khim seldom went there, probably once or twice a week. She grew her own vegetables, so only needed to buy meat, such as pork and chicken, and fish, and sometimes fruit from the market. Arriving at the market, which included both stalls and shops, outdoors and indoors, across several blocks, we took a look around. Siu-khim stopped at one particular shop, took a plastic bag, and started to pick some apples. Later on we went past pork butchers and she said to me:

I prefer to buy pork or chicken from people who keep pigs and chicken by themselves. The meat sold in the market contains too many antibiotics. But the

⁷ Tourists tend to buy small products as souvenirs as they costs less, whereas larger products are usually made for more practical purposes, and are more expensive.

problem is – when you buy pork from the pig farm, you have to buy, for instance, one-fourth of a whole pig. It is not always easy to find people who want to share with you, and it is far too much for me otherwise. And there isn't always any chicken available, and you sometimes have to wait, so that's why I still have to shop at the market.

Our last destination was the rush shop. Siu-khim had had to take her car, as she was going to buy rushes and it is impossible to carry seven or eight bundles of rushes on a motorcycle. After arriving, she spent some time chatting with the shopkeeper, the only rush dealer in town, and with his wife. Then she went into the storeroom to look at the season's rush crop, while the shopkeeper was dealing with another customer. Some elderly weavers order rushes by phone. However, transportation can be a problem if they are unable to drive or are without access to a car or motorcycle. In such situations, the shopkeeper delivers the rushes to their homes using his motorcycle. As these weavers had only bought a few bundles of rushes, which were enough for what they were producing, it was possible to deliver by motorcycle. In the end Siu-khim made a decision on the particular bundles she wanted, and the shopkeeper helped her load them into her car. Seven to eight bundles almost filled her car.

When we left the rush shop and headed back, it was already sometime past noon. It was a hot sunny day. On such days I always wear sunglasses, a fisherman's cap⁸ under the helmet, gloves, and sleeves, to protect me from sunstroke. Siu-khim also wears sleeves when driving a car or walking in the sun. On our way back to Siu-khim's house, we happened to see some men and women drying large amounts of rush. Siu-khim stopped her car and I stopped my motorcycle on the roadside. I took off my gloves, helmet, and sunglasses, and we walked towards them. We found that the rushes were newly harvested from the field beside the road. Siu-khim was very interested in their harvest and asked them whether they would like to sell her any. Later on Siu-khim told me:

The rush grown in this area is of high quality and very suitable for weaving. Unfortunately, most rush in this area is under contract to the rush dealer, so the farmers cannot sell to anyone other than the rush dealer. The farmers grow as much rush as the rush dealer requests. The rushes I am now using in weaving

⁸ It is basically a peaked cap with a piece of cloth which covers the back of the neck, which I bought in a fishing shop.

were from the first harvest of last year, and I bought them from a farmer⁹ in another village. They're of high quality and very suitable for weaving too, as the stem is long and beautiful.

In addition to her personal affairs, Siu-khim often attended public events. Having built up a relationship with the TREH, she started to teach rush-weaving classes, at the TREH and other venues. Often people would get in touch with Siu-khim through introductions made by the TREH. When teaching at the TREH, she rode her motorcycle as it was more convenient, but when teaching in a neighbouring county she drove her car, which took about two hours round trip. This particular class she taught three hours per week, twelve weeks in total. Also, she took a train, taking between three to five hours, in order to teach classes in counties further away, which took place generally once a year.

In addition to teaching, Siu-khim often gave weaving demonstrations at the TREH. On one particular day, Siu-khim and another weaver, Ang-khi, were weaving for visitors in the demonstration area at the TREH. The Farmers' Association were holding a large-scale event, and many local people as well as visitors from other places had come to attend. An elderly couple, who used to run a rush-weaving hat-and-mat shop, came to the demonstration area and watched Ang-khi and Siu-khim weaving for a while. Later on they began to chat with each other, and the four talked about their childhood memories of making rush-weaving objects. Ang-khi was almost eighty years old. Whenever I met her in the TREH, she was usually very quiet and just kept weaving. On this day, however, her conversation became highly agitated: 'I have been weaving since I was seven or eight. Now I am in my seventies. Why do I do this? For sustenance!' Siu-khim felt somewhat differently about it than Ang-khi, and said: 'As a teenage girl I felt, as I do now, that it's great that I can earn money by making these objects! I earn money all by myself so that I no longer have to ask for money from anyone else.'

Although I worked with Siu-khim only during the summer, I noticed that her daily life differed slightly depending on whether it was summer or winter, through her

⁹ Instead of the rush dealer.

description of how her arrangements for work and holiday differed depending on the season. Summer is the high season for the rush-weaving industry. Products sell out quickly, and orders are placed with weavers such as Siu-khim on a frequent basis. Most often, she finishes one order before beginning another. Customers are willing to wait for the product they want, even if it takes several weeks to be completed. Therefore Siu-khim is always on standby to meet the incoming orders, and can very seldom go anywhere for any length of time.

In winter, which is the low season for the rush-weaving industry, the demand for rush-woven products tends to decrease. In the museum shop at the TREH, for instance, not many visitors buy rush-woven bed mats, products which are more suitable for the summer. Nevertheless, production does not come to a halt. This is because tourists still like to purchase souvenirs, usually smaller items, such as rush-woven brooches. Hence, Siu-khim still makes and delivers items to the TREH regularly in winter. However, she can take longer holidays, at least a couple of them, during the winter. As a whole, a weaver's life more or less corresponds to the seasonal changes in the rush-weaving industry.

The beauty matters

In the following sections, I will investigate how the beauty of rush-woven objects is related to the properties of the material as well as to the value and virtue of weaving. In order to make beautiful objects, a weaver needs to understand and perceive the properties of rush and to have relevant knowledge and skill to complete the production. Due to the fact that there is a set of standards of beauty for rush-woven objects, the beauty of objects is achieved by a weaver's *chhiu-lo* as well as the value and virtue of weaving. These will be detailed later in this chapter.

In this section, I will explore why the beauty of the rush-woven objects is the most important concern of weavers in the process of production, and what the standards of beauty are. Beauty matters to weavers because objects are made as commodities. Weavers are supposed to make objects that are up to a certain standard of quality,

which satisfy the merchants. Most, if not all, of the weavers are making objects as a subsistence activity, and therefore they want to earn as much as they can by selling their work. As such, the weaver's goal in weaving is to make beautiful objects, and her purpose in weaving is to sell them at a good price. In the transaction between a weaver and a merchant, the price of an object is decided by its quality, in this case, its beauty. The more beautiful an object is, the more money it can earn. In addition, the negotiation between weavers and merchants, as described in Chapter One, takes place in almost every transaction. In negotiation, the merchant tends to cut the price, whereas the weaver tries hard to increase the price. By the end of the negotiation, the merchant decides the price by evaluating the product according to certain standards of beauty, while the weaver will hopefully secure a good deal if the items produced are of extraordinary beauty.

It is important to point out that the set standards of beauty are the result of a consensus view among weavers and merchants. Although merchants decide whether or not they will buy products from weavers, it is not these merchants alone who set up the standards of beauty for weavers to follow. Rather, the standards as they exist are the result of a long-term accumulation throughout the development of the industry. To regard an object as beautiful or not is commonly supposed to be very subjective. However, in the rush-weaving industry, there has developed a set of objective standards of beauty for weavers to follow, most probably due to the influence of the Japanese legacy. As described in Chapter One, the Japanese colonial administration set up an institute for the inspection of rush-woven products. In so doing, the administration regulated and examined the colour, shape, and ways in which products were made, in order to ensure their quality. Hence, it is possible that the current set of standards of beauty for rush-woven objects has been inherited from these Japanese regulations, though not without change over time. Nevertheless, the set of standards has become, in effect, an agreement between contemporary weavers and merchants. They share the same aesthetics in terms of how rush-woven products should be made. However, while the majority of weavers share this consensus on beauty, it is important to note that a very small group of weavers wish to develop a new set of standards of beauty. Thus, through the emergence of different opinions

regarding standards of beauty, alternative values and virtues are articulated in respect of weaving. This transformation will be examined in Chapter Three. In this chapter I first investigate the established consensus on standards of beauty, as shared by the majority of weavers and merchants.

Before I move on to illustrate these standards, it is necessary to distinguish two terms – ‘*sui*’ and ‘*chhiu-lo*’ – which in the Taiwanese Holo language are used in relation to the beauty of rush-woven objects. These terms are not just used in the context of the rush-weaving industry but also used very broadly in various social contexts. ‘*Sui*’ means beautiful or nice. ‘*Chhiu-lo*’ usually refers to a personal skill; ‘*chhiu*’ is hand and ‘*lo*’ is road (or path, way). While *sui* is a more general term that can refer to a beautiful girl or a handsome boy, a nice object, and a satisfying situation, *chhiu-lo* is used in more specific contexts. *Chhiu-lo* tends to be used when describing the use of an individual’s hands or body to achieve a particular goal. In this situation, *chhiu-lo* refers to one’s distinctive ability, and is neither positive nor negative, but neutral. However, if it is used as an adjective, it often means an extraordinary technique, a forte, without peer amongst others. For instance, *chhiu-lo-chhai* can be used in respect of a dish that one is especially good at cooking.

In the context of Yuanli rush-weaving, Yuanli people in general, including weavers and non-weavers, use both ‘*sui*’ and ‘*chhiu-lo*’ to refer to situations related to rush-woven objects, but the meanings are different. What is described below is my observation of how Yuanli people use these two terms in their daily lives. Yuanli people use ‘*sui*’ to show their appreciation of a beautiful object. A beautiful object means an admirable product and a commodity which can sell at a high price. When they use ‘*chhiu-lo*’, there is always an implication of comparison among weavers in terms of their skills, i.e. superior or inferior skill. This can either be a direct, physical comparison of two objects, or a judgement made on an object with another weaver’s produce in mind. Yuanli people use the idea of ‘*chhiu-lo*’ to judge the ability of makers through their objects. A weaver of superior ‘*chhiu-lo*’ can make extraordinary products, whereas a weaver of inferior ‘*chhiu-lo*’ can only make ordinary products. Normally only good ‘*chhiu-lo*’ can lead to beautiful objects, and merchants tend to

buy good products from weavers. But, since merchants provide for the needs of a variety of customers, different levels of '*chhiu-lo*' can coexist in the marketplace.

To sum up the distinction between '*sui*' and '*chhiu-lo*', I suggest that *chhiu-lo* is the means to achieve beauty in the production of rush-woven objects. More importantly, it is because of the existence of a set of standards of beauty that it is possible to distinguish whether or not a weaver's *chhiu-lo* is good, depending on whether she is able to make objects that can meet the standards. The dynamic relationship between the two will be analysed toward the end of this chapter. In the following sections, I will examine beauty first and then '*chhiu-lo*' in detail. In a later section, I will explain in detail a list of the attributes of *chhiu-lo*, which I learned from an informant. I believe that when she shared her understanding of the attributes, she was not just giving me her subjective opinions on which object is more beautiful and which is less so. Rather, she was expressing what she believed to be the shared aesthetics of rush-woven objects.

What, then, are the standards of beauty? I found that three elements are most crucial: firstly, the colour and the grain of weaving should be even. That is, the whole piece of work should be done in the same colour of rush rather than intertwined with different colours. Here the colour refers to the original colour rather than the dyed colour. The grain ought to consist of pieces of rush of the same size. Secondly, an article should be carefully and neatly made. It ought not to contain *beh-to*, literally 'white belly', which is the revealed fibre from inside the stem of the rush. Thirdly, each piece of work should be complete and in good shape. From the beginning to the end, each part ought to be woven properly.

Guided by the standards of beauty, there are qualities required of a beautiful object, pertaining to the aspects of colour and grain. The colour is preferably red and even, rather than green and blended. This is achieved by the weaver's practice of drying the rush in the sun to get the red colour and careful selection of rush to make the overall colour even, especially the removal of the particularly green part. A piece of rush, which is between 150 and 180 centimetres in length, is not of the same colour

throughout. The head of the rush, the weaver's term referring to the part that is close to the root, tends to become yellowish, whereas the tail of the rush, i.e. the part at the top of the plant, is much greener than the rest. If a weaver does not remove the tail of the rush in weaving, the finished object becomes intertwined with the green pieces. Even though the object is dried in the sun, the tail of the rush is always greener than the other parts.

The grain, i.e. each line of the rush-woven object, is preferred to be full, what the weaver calls 'fat' or 'thick', that is, without any empty space. It means that every piece of rush is entwined seamlessly with each other. Moreover, the object ought to be made with either fine grains or excellent patterns. Furthermore, the shape of the form, e.g. the form of a handbag or a hat, or the pattern, e.g. of Chinese or English characters, flowers, animals, and geometric shapes, ought to be natural and proper. This means that, for instance, the curve of the woman's hat is smooth and the four corners of a mat are all at a right angle and perfectly straight.

These qualities of a beautiful object contain both the beauty of the material and the beauty of a weaver's skill. After production the rush-woven object is once again dried in the sun until a golden brown to red colour appears. This is the material at its most beautiful. The beauty of skill is manifested in the fact that the object is carefully and neatly made, and it has fine grains or excellent patterns. Only when both these qualities of beauty are combined can a product be sold at its best price from a weaver's hand, otherwise the price is reduced due to the lack of any one of these qualities.

The thought behind these standards and qualities, as an informant told me, is that 'weavers want to make each and every rush-woven object durable'. I suppose that this thought is shared by most, if not all, of the weavers. The informant further explained to me that a weaver thinks carefully about the potential user of an object and believes that if the texture of an object is full and thick, it is strong and able to withstand wear. If the colour is red or white, which is made by being smoked with sulphur, the object does not get dark quickly but will remain fairly new and therefore

will last.

How can the qualities of a beautiful object be achieved? I suggest that it comes from the combination of a weaver's knowledge, skill, and personality. By examining the way in which weaving proceeds, I found that special knowledge is embedded in each step throughout the process. That is, a weaver achieves the standards of beauty only when she possesses the knowledge. And a weaver integrates and employs her understanding of the material and the skill of weaving to accomplish the production of an article.

A weaver's knowledge is related to the various qualities of the rush, and the ultimate purpose of employing her knowledge is the beauty of the object. Firstly there is the knowledge which a weaver needs when she buys the rush. Careful and good choice of the rush in the rush shop is very important. If the rush is not of good quality, it is difficult to improve its colour no matter how long it is dried in the sun. The weaver should be able to distinguish good rush from bad. An experienced weaver is able to discern the condition of the rush, and any inherent problems, at a glance. For instance, if the weaver sees that the rush is an unusual green colour, she will suspect that fertilizer was left on the rush. As my master weaver taught me, if a farmer harvests the rush earlier than he is supposed to and therefore does not allow the rush to grow long enough for the fertilizer to fade naturally, the green colour of the rush will become darker than normal. This definitely influences the final product as the colour is too green and drying in the sun cannot make the colour better or the article prettier.

Hence, by seeing the colour of the rush, the weaver knows its condition, as the unusual colour reveals different problems, which are even referred to by certain terms. There are also other kinds of problems which can occur with rush. '*Kim-chhang-thau*' refers to a kind of problem which frequently occurs in rush which is cut in the third harvest of the year. The rush is thin and short, and its top is an unusual yellow colour, which cannot be changed by drying in the sun. '*Ang-ki*', literally 'red plant', occurs when the rush is dried in the sun, but has not been turned

frequently, so that one side is much redder than the other. '*Si-boe-chhau*' means that the plant is dead before it flowers, and therefore the end of the rush is weak and not usable. Only the part that is close to the root can be used in weaving. '*Thih-teng-a-boe*', literally translated as a tail like a nail, refers to a piece of rush that has a thick front and a thin end. Using this kind of rush in making a mat causes grains to become loose because of the difference in thickness. Therefore, it is not fit for making objects that need to be woven by pieces of long rush. In contrast, '*phong-boe-chhau*', which means the rush with a thick end, is even in terms of the thickness of the whole piece of rush, and therefore is much more suitable for making large objects. Some of the above problems can be overcome, but others simply make the rush unusable. Therefore, after buying the rush, a weaver always spends plenty of time drying it in the sun until the desired colour appears.

A weaver also knows about the relationship between the quality of the rush and the field where it grows. The nature of each field differs, and therefore different fields produce different characteristics in rush. The rush from certain fields is more suitable for weaving than the rush from other fields. That is, the weaver will enjoy working with rush from one field rather than another, due to the particular qualities of the rush produced in that particular field. For example, a weaver might prefer rush that is long and moderately hard. From accumulated experience, weavers know which rush from which field is more suitable for weaving. Therefore, some experienced weavers like Siu-khim will ask which field the plant is from when they purchase rush.

The last type of knowledge required for buying the material relates to timing, i.e. when the rush is bought. Timing is crucial. The best rush can only be purchased at certain times of the year, when it is newly harvested. If a good harvest sells out, the weaver will have to wait another year until the next harvest. So, before buying, the weaver must calculate and decide the amount of rush needed for the whole year. If not, when she runs out of rush, there will be no suitable material left to purchase. Consequently she will fail to make objects as beautiful as she had hoped, due to the lack of good quality material.

After buying the material, the weaver needs to know which rush to select before beginning production. She must choose the most suitable rush for making a certain kind of product, and the selection depends on the characteristics of the product, that is, whether it is large or small in size, whether it has very fine grains, and so on. These further relate to what qualities of rush are needed, based on which the rush from a particular harvest is chosen. The size of the product determines whether long or short rush is used. As money, time, and effort are spent on rush, the weaver treasures it and always makes the best use of each and every piece. Long rush is used only when a large article is being made, otherwise a significant proportion of the rush may be wasted when the object is finished. The length of the rush is also related to the beauty of the object. If short rush is used in making a large object, the rush is used up before the article is completed. A weaver then has to continue the weaving by adding new pieces of rush, which inevitably influences the form and beauty of the object, or possibly she may fail to finish the work.

Rush from different harvests has different characteristics, and is suitable for making different kinds of products. There are three harvests a year, in May, August, and November. The rush from the first harvest, called *cha-chhau*, is relatively soft, and therefore it is better when the whole stem is used rather than being split. Otherwise, it is difficult for the weaver to hold and to weave. Owing to the fact that it is preferable that the whole stem is used in weaving, *cha-chhau* is used for making the kind of article in which the expression of fineness is not the focal point. For example, an experienced weaver once told me why she made a piece of work in thick rather than fine grains. It was not because of her inability to make it in finer grains, but due to the fact that fine grains cannot show the patterns clearly but instead damage the patterns. That is, the patterns are best expressed when there is a proper balance between the woven-holes and the filled-parts. The holes become very small or even indistinguishable when the grains are fine. In addition, cheaper products are usually made with the whole stem rather than the split rush. In contrast to *cha-chhau*, the rush from the second harvest, which is called *un-a-chhau*, is pliable but strong. It is relatively hard at its core and therefore not easy to weave with the whole stem, which makes it ideal for splitting and using in making articles of fine grain. The rush from

the third harvest is short and thin and therefore is not ideal for weaving. Occasionally it is used in making tiny objects.

Whether the thick or thin rush is used relates to the degree of fineness of the article that is required. The degree of fineness is referred to as '*kui-choah-chhun*', which means the number of lines in one *chhun*. *Chhun* is a unit of length equal to one-third of a decimetre (i.e. about three centimetres). '*Kui-choah-chhun*' is a phrase used between weavers and merchants to negotiate and decide the fineness of a product, and is also used when weavers are discussing how fine a product is. Some merchants, in order to be accurate, use a ruler to examine and count the lines, whereas most experienced merchants and weavers can tell the number of lines at a glance. The finest object can have more than twenty lines in one *chhun*, whereas an ordinary one, e.g. the cheaper product, only has five lines in one *chhun*. Usually, it is the merchant who requests the degree of fineness of a product and it is often the case that the finer the object is, the higher the price that it can command, therefore the finer the better. Nonetheless, occasionally the weaver will evaluate whether or not a product is suitable for fine grains, taking into consideration the shape and pattern, if the merchant does not request the degree of fineness.

After the degree of fineness is decided, and if the whole stem is not being used, the weaver needs to employ her knowledge and skill in splitting the rush. If a weaver is requested to make a product with a certain number of lines in one *chhun*, she knows the corresponding divisions in the rush that she should make when she splits the stem. A piece of stem, the width of which is less than 0.5 centimetres, can be divided into two, three, four or even more portions. Also, a weaver knows the number of pieces of rush needed to weave an object, and she has to select all of the rush from her storeroom at the same time so that the quality of each piece is matched as closely as possible in order that the object produced is even.

Splitting the rush is not an easy job but requires great ingenuity and dexterity on the weaver's part. The rush stem is usually between 150 and 180 centimetres long, and therefore the weaver's movement needs to be steady, well controlled, and balanced

throughout the process of splitting each piece of rush. The rush has a large front and small end, so the weaver needs to make subtle adjustments in the middle in order to ensure that the thickness at both ends of each split rush is as even as possible. If the rush is not split evenly or not divided properly according to the requirements of the product, it is not suitable for use. It can probably be used later, but otherwise is wasted.

Because the rush is split, the fibre that used to be inside the stem is exposed. This fibre is called *beh-to*, literally translated as ‘white belly’, that is, the fibre is like a belly that is turned inside out, and is white in colour. After the split rush is hit with the hammer, weavers rub the rush in their palms to make the green skin cover the white fibre. If a weaver does not cover the fibre by rubbing carefully, she has to conceal it in the underneath of the item, i.e. the side facing the ground, rather than expose it in the outer surface, i.e. that side which faces upwards during the weaving process. Otherwise, the finished object will include light brown rush, i.e. the colour of the dry rush, interwoven with the white colour, i.e. the fibre.

The rush, both the split rush and the whole stem, ought to be hit with a wooden hammer before weaving in order to further soften the material, making the rush more flexible. A small bundle of rush is tied by a long piece of cotton string from beginning to end with the string in a spiral shape, one curve above the other, in order to fasten the rush and to avoid breaking it when hammering. The hammer is made from a whole piece of tree trunk and therefore is very heavy. Nonetheless, weavers usually have to hit even a small bundle of rush more than one hundred times. If the rush is hit with the hammer thoroughly, it becomes very flat and the weaving is much easier. On the other hand, if the hammering is not done properly, the rush is harder to handle and the object ends up looking less attractive.

Apart from all of the knowledge which is required both of the material and how it is handled, as noted above, a weaver also needs the knowledge and skill of weaving. Although there are various kinds of products and each product has a variety of styles, the basic categories in weaving are ‘fine objects’ and ‘patterns’. Making the finest

objects and excellent patterns are both ultimate goals in weaving, but in contemporary times one can hardly find a weaver who is capable in both skills. Most outstanding weavers have one, and are less developed in the other skill. The skill, or more precisely, the personality needed in these two key categories of attainment, is different. I learned this through my apprenticeship with my master weaver. She prefers making various patterns to producing very fine objects, and she told me what she liked and disliked comparing the two types of making. Nevertheless, I found that her distinction could be applied to the weaving practice of other weavers. Makers of very fine articles usually have no interest in weaving various patterns, but are interested rather in making objects finer and finer. Learning or considering the variation of patterns is a troublesome or relatively hard matter for them, so they mostly make plain objects without patterns. On the contrary, makers of excellent patterns are fond of trying and learning various and new patterns, whereas making very fine objects is of no interest to them, or even boring. Therefore, they would rather use their efforts to focus on making existing or new patterns.

As far as making patterns is concerned, an experienced weaver has all of the various patterns in her head, and makes them from memory. If she is requested to make unfamiliar or new patterns, she can make it as long as there is a sample of the pattern for her to copy. In this case, some weavers, apart from making the ordered product, weave another copy of the pattern as their own sample for reference in later production. Also, some weavers make a new pattern that they have created by drawing a simple draft on paper and counting the number of pieces of rush required in order to make the particular variation. These methods are all based on their decades of experience. While weavers from a younger generation might tend to write down notes on the steps required to make a pattern, senior weavers read out a pithy formula or mnemonics for themselves in the process of making the patterns.

In order for a form or pattern to be shaped properly, the most crucial aspect is the control of the balanced strength of both the weaver's hands. Very often in the process of weaving an object the strength of two hands is unequal, which makes the work slope forward or backward and, for example, a mat that is supposed to be of a

rectangular shape, is out of shape.

Finally, a weaver should be knowledgeable about maintenance. It is important to take care of the finished articles, including thoroughly drying them in the sun and covering them with a plastic bag to avoid the formation of mildew. Otherwise the article is ruined because of ill treatment, even in the short period before selling it to a merchant.

In the process of weaving, every step is equally significant and can influence the final appearance of the article, and each step is interrelated in the way that one imperfection may lead to another. In other words, any careless step leads to the failure of the whole piece of work. Therefore, the success or failure of a piece of work is effectively decided at the very beginning of production. Or, more precisely, whether a weaver is weaving in a deliberate or careless way, to a large extent, determines the quality of an article.

What I have illustrated so far are the kinds of knowledge and skill that are embedded in a weaver's practice of making rush-woven objects. I will move on to look at how the skill of weaving is deeply related to a weaver's body and senses. It is indeed a skill that is embedded in the human body. A weaver incorporates her various kinds of knowledge related to weaving, her skill, and her bodily movement and thus the beauty of the rush-woven object is achieved.

Being an apprentice rush-weaver: my bodily and sensual experiences

I chose to become an apprentice rush-weaver when I was in the field. In so doing, I came to understand the ways in which a weaver uses her body in the process of weaving as well as her bodily experiences, including discomfort, pain, and even wounds. I had three phases of apprenticeship. In the first phase, I worked with people in the community workroom, where nine weavers made rush-woven objects for sale on weekdays. This was where I learned the most basic skills of weaving. With basic knowledge and weaving skills, I was able to attend two series of training classes held

by the community association and the TREH for experienced weavers. The third and most important phase was learning from my master weaver Siu-khim in her house, where I was able to advance my skills and make several objects properly, such as the rose brooch, the basket, the bowl, and the patterned handbag.

As an apprentice, throughout the process I made an effort to cope with the physical pain caused by the special bodily movements required in weaving. Generally speaking, a weaver sits on the ground when weaving. Only some of them, while making small products, in contrast to the bed mat or the handbag, choose to sit on a chair, in which they feel more comfortable. While sitting on the ground, the weaver's legs are open and the object being made is in the middle between them. The upper body and the legs are at a vertical angle. I, like the weavers, had to arch my back and lean forward in order to reach the object in front of me. I recorded all of my bodily experiences as a rush-weaving apprentice:

[8 November 2005]

This is the first day of my apprenticeship of weaving. I have experienced various feelings in different parts of my body. At the end of a day, I have aches in my neck, back, and waist.

[10 November 2005]

I learned how to hit the rush with a wooden hammer, in order to make each piece of rush flat and easy to be woven. In the middle of hammering the first bundle of rush, I felt that my arm was too sore to keep beating. It was because the wooden hammer was so heavy, and to my surprise it took a long time to make the rush flat. In addition, after hammering, I had blisters, caused by friction, on the thumb and forefinger of my right hand.

[28 November 2005]

Today, I started to sit on the ground and weave a piece of mat. I wove for two hours. By about 5pm, I could almost stand it no longer. I had sores on my knees and waist. I felt that I could not sit there any more. After going home in the dusk, I just wanted to lie down to rest my back and waist. And I lost my appetite. Later on, while eating my dinner, I just grabbed the food in my bowl without saying a word, because I was so tired. In addition, the tip of my left thumb was painful because of the effort needed to pull and fasten the rush in weaving.

[30 November 2005]

Today is the third day since I started to sit on the ground and weave, and I found, unlike the previous day, that I no longer feel extremely uncomfortable and unable to sit on the ground to weave. My body is gradually getting used to it. Although my right upper arm, forearm, and knee were still sore and painful, and I could not walk properly because of pain in my knees, when standing up and going to the

toilet, my back and the tip of my left thumb were less painful.

From my bodily experience of weaving, I realised that one of the most difficult things about weaving is not so much related to skills, but is associated with the body. On the first day of my apprenticeship, I was told by my master weaver to learn the most basic skill and sit on a chair to weave. The feeling of sitting on a chair and sitting on the ground are entirely different. The former is much more comfortable than the latter. Even so my body was sore. However, I had more pain while, a couple of weeks later when I had learned the basic skills and was allowed to advance, I was sitting on the ground to weave, and it took longer for my body to become accustomed to it. My master weaver Siu-khim once told me, ‘these days many young people are interested in learning how to weave, but they are impatient and cannot stand sitting on the ground.’

While I suffered from the pain in my body, I never heard the weavers who I worked with complaining about their painful knees, waist, neck, back, or arms. Not only the body, but also the hands of a weaver are extremely strong. The tip, especially the nail, of my left thumb was painful due to the effort used to pull and fasten the rush while weaving, and several of my fingertips, the areas that were subjected to friction, became rough and covered with calluses after a few days of weaving. In addition, when I was learning among other weavers, they always reminded me to wrap up my right ring finger with adhesive tape to protect it. Some of them used adhesive tape too, but others did not. Even though I had used the adhesive tape, after a whole day of weaving, I still had pain in my ring finger because of the constant friction experienced, as I held each piece of rush while I wove.

A weaver’s fingers are not only strong enough to suffer from pain, but are also very sensitive. A weaver has to have a very sensitive touch whereby she can distinguish various kinds of conditions, such as the degree of flatness of the rush made by hammering, the degree of moistness and hardness of the rush, the pliability of the rush, the size of the rush, and so on.

Apart from her body and hands, the weaver exercises her eyes a great deal in

weaving. This is particularly true when she is making an object with very fine grains or difficult patterns, and her eyes can end up sore and tired very easily. Moreover, many weavers are elderly women. They have poor eyesight and can hardly see their objects. In such cases the weavers mostly weave according to their touch and experience. But occasionally they have to look at the object carefully in order to distinguish the grains or patterns. A weaver's eyes are often prone to tears due to the nature of the work. However, weaving is a subsistence activity. Therefore, weavers use it to earn money and save as much money as they can. Thus, more often than not, they end up working in conditions without sufficient light, which makes their eyesight even worse and the burden on their eyes even heavier.

It is possible that, because the weavers who I worked with were well trained, their bodies and hands have gradually become less painful, or that they have already got used to such kinds of bodily experience. However, I suggest that it is not that the body, hands, and eyes of a weaver are so strong that they never get hurt, but it is the ways in which weaving is practiced that enable her to withstand all of the physical discomfort.

Because the body suffers from extreme discomfort, some weavers choose to sit on a wooden board slightly higher than the ground, or on a chair. However, I was told by my master weaver that a mat cannot be flat if one weaves it while not sitting on the ground, because both the angle between a weaver's hands and the object and the movement of her body will be different, and the object turns into something less attractive. In addition, when a weaver is sitting on the ground to weave, she not only uses her hands but her feet, toes, and other parts of her body to help in the process of making an object. Therefore, each part of the body can be very useful in weaving, and a weaver sometimes creates her own way of using the body according to the different methods of making various objects. Hence, I found that a weaver is willing to suffer for the beauty of the object.

From my observation of what weavers said and did, I found that the manner of weaving is composed of two parts: a weaver should be patient throughout the process

of production, and she should be able to withstand the suffering caused by weaving. The suffering includes sitting on the ground and weaving for as long as she can, having sore eyes and waist, and aching legs and fingers. I argue that the manner of weaving is actually the virtue of weaving, and I distinguish it from what I call the value of weaving, i.e. the standards (or principles, proper ways) of weaving. I will discuss the value of weaving in detail in the next chapter, because it is exactly from the tension between tradition and innovation in rush-weaving that one can understand the meaning of the value of weaving. I will also show how the value and virtue of weaving are changing due to the tension between tradition and innovation.

‘Chhiu-lo’ – the combination of knowledge, skill and personality

‘Chhiu-lo’ – which means ‘the way of hand-making’ in the context of rush-weaving – is used to describe the personal skill and style of a weaver. In my one year of fieldwork, I realised that this term is always employed as an important means of judging the way in which a rush-woven object is made. By ‘chhiu-lo’, Yuanli people are not only judging whether or not the object is beautiful, but also judging whether the weaver who made this object is skilful or not. When I revisited the field later, I took the opportunity to further explore the meaning of *chhiu-lo* from the perspective of Yuanli people. I visited Hui-hun one morning, and we were sitting in the museum shop of the TREH (where Hui-hun works) and chatting. Eventually I posed a question hoping to find out what she thought about *chhiu-lo*:

Me: what does the term ‘chhiu-lo’ mean? I know this term and I’ve heard people using it quite a lot. But I don’t feel that I really understand it. What is it?

Hui-hun: take the ‘fisherman’s hat’¹⁰ made by Chan Hong-ngo for example, you would not feel there is anything special about it at first glance. But, if you look at it carefully, you will find that the lines and the colour of the rush are so even, the curve so smooth and natural, that it is different to those hats made by others, and in its delicacy.

Me: what does it mean when you say ‘the colour of rush is so even’?

Hui-hun: she removed the tail of rush¹¹. That’s why the colour can be so even.

Me: the delicacy ... do you mean ‘kui-choah-chhun’?

Hui-hun: no, it’s not like that. [Pondering for a while] It’s the personality. It’s the

¹⁰ A kind of woman’s hat sold in the museum shop.

¹¹ It is the end of the stem of rush, usually greener than the other part.

habit of producing.

Me: the habit of producing?

Hui-hun: some people are scrupulous, while others are sloppy. When they weave, the way of weaving an object is exactly like a weaver's personality – scrupulous or sloppy.

Me: in terms of the curve, how did she make it? There used to be a wooden model for the shape of a hat. But the 'fisherman's hat' is a new style, and there is no model at all. So, how?

Hui-hun: so, as I said, it's the individual's personality. She is this kind of person, so she figured it out. Like her handbag, the four corners of the bottom are never lopsided.

Throughout the above conversation, Hui-hun was trying her best to make me understand what *chhiu-lo* means by giving me the example of Chan Hong-ngo who is a weaver with very good *chhiu-lo*. Hui-hun found that a good way to explain *chhiu-lo* to people like me, an outsider who does not have the ability to distinguish one weaver's style from another, is to compare two objects of the same kind produced by different weavers. For instance, she showed me two handbags with the camellia pattern made by two weavers. The two handbags look very similar at first glance, but one can find dissimilarities by examining the objects carefully. In so doing, Hui-hun could explain to me the difference between superior and inferior *chhiu-lo*. The four corners of the bottom of a handbag made symmetrically is an example that shows that Chan Hong-ngo always pays attention to ensure that every detail is up to the highest of standards. By contrast, when a weaver makes a handbag, of which the four corners of the bottom are not equally balanced, it is not due to her lack of knowledge or skill, but rather due to a lack of care and effort.

I found that most Yuanli people have this ability to make judgments by *chhiu-lo*, and distinguish the skilfully made objects from the rest. I suggest that this is owing to their day-to-day contact with rush-woven objects. In other words, Yuanli people are living in a place which the aesthetics of rush-weaving have permeated. When Hui-hun described to me the ways of distinguishing *chhiu-lo*, she was not just stating the qualities of beauty according to the consensus standards, e.g. the curve of objects, the even colour and grain, the proper pattern and shape, and the delicacy. More importantly, she was finding the reason why, and the way in which, beauty could be achieved. Thus, I suggest that *chhiu-lo* represents the efforts which lie behind the achievement of the standards of beauty. *Chhiu-lo*, I argue, comes from a weaver's

combination of all her knowledge, skill, and most important of all, her personality, in the production of rush-woven objects.

However, the personality of a weaver is different from the manner of weaving. The manner of weaving, or what I call the virtue of weaving, is like the ideal model, which consists of a set of ideas shared by most weavers. Furthermore they put these ideas into their practice of weaving. Because of the manner of weaving, a weaver is practising weaving in a particular way. While the manner is a common virtue among all weavers, personality is individually different. While all weavers are expected to work in the same manner, there is a difference between ‘scrupulous’ and ‘sloppy,’ careful or not careful enough, putting in all of her effort or only part of her effort. The beauty of a rush-woven object comes not only from the manner of weaving but also from a weaver’s personality. Hence, *chhiu-lo* represents an individual weaver’s personality, and it is embedded in her objects. Thereby, the object represents the weaver, through its embodiment of *chhiu-lo*.

I have also found that because of the experience of being a weaver, the woman’s hands lead her thoughts and find the way, which is like the metaphor of *chhiu-lo*, i.e. literally, *chhiu* is hand and *lo* is road. It became obvious when I examined weavers’ life stories and found the striking similarity between them. Take my master weaver for example. Siu-khim is now a weaver by profession, but rush-weaving is not the only job she has had in her life. She has been a rush-weaver since she was aged seven or eight. In her thirties, the price of rush-woven objects became less profitable, so she gave up weaving and started to sew shoes with a sewing machine. In her late thirties, she had several different occupations; sewing bags with a sewing machine, crocheting things with yarn and wool, and weaving rattan-mats with a machine in a factory. Recently, in her late fifties, she has started to make rush-woven objects again. What these different kinds of work have in common is that they all require the dexterity and ingenuity of her hands. Indeed, women of Siu-khim’s generation share a similar experience of doing these various types of work. Even though each of them gave up weaving at some point in their life, they still took an occupation that needed their hands, which were well-trained by rush-weaving. Later on, when it was

possible, they returned to practice rush-weaving. This is what I meant earlier in terms of how a weaver is shaped by weaving.

Conclusion

Rush-woven objects offer the feeling of coolness, which is made possible by the material used in weaving, the plant itself having special qualities. It grows only in a specific wetland, and is available locally in relation to the particular qualities of the environment. I have found that, as detailed in Chapter One, the quality of the material decides the way in which rush-woven objects are produced. Because rush is not suitable for machine work, the objects are completely handmade. Also, because of the qualities of rush, which constantly change in relation to the environment and especially in relation to weather conditions, weavers are compelled to treat it in a particular way. Nonetheless, once the process of weaving starts, it is the weaver who combines everything in order to complete an object. On the one hand, she puts together her understanding of the qualities of material and her understanding of the environment, and thereby changes the qualities of the rush in order to weave the object. On the other hand, she combines her knowledge and skill of weaving and her personality, which ultimately leads to the production of beautiful objects.

In the process of making an object, both the manner of weaving and an individual weaver's personality are indispensable to the beauty of an object. Because of the manner of production, a weaver puts up with physical suffering in order to bring about the beauty of objects. Because of the individual weaver's personality, each weaver's work is different and represents the maker. I argue that *chhiu-lo* is the connection between an object and its maker. This is because *chhiu-lo* comes from the combination of a weaver's knowledge, skill and personality, and therefore it is particular to each individual weaver. That is, there might be similar but never the same *chhiu-lo*, just as the weavers would be different. In a word, each *chhiu-lo* is unique. In addition, *chhiu-lo* is embedded in the object, and the object is the embodiment of *chhiu-lo*. It is the object that makes the *chhiu-lo* visible, and it is the *chhiu-lo* that makes the weaver visible. Therefore, the object represents the weaver.

In other words, the weaver is not only weaving an object, but is weaving the embodiment of her personality with her hands. She is reflected in the object.

It seems that a weaver uses all her effort in order to produce beautiful objects for sale. But, more importantly, she does so because she is ‘shaped by the making’ (Bray 1997). As a maker of rush-woven objects, her work represents an indispensable combination of knowledge, skill and personality, in order to produce a piece of work successfully. In addition, *chhiu-lo* has shown ‘how persons make things and things make persons’ (Tilley 2006). *Chhiu-lo* becomes visible because it is the outcome of the weaver making the object. Nonetheless, it is exactly in the same process that a weaver is made, in the way that her hands lead her thoughts. This is what she becomes by being a weaver. She is what she does.

In this chapter, based on my ethnographic data I have focussed on the material and properties of rush and I have shown that rush-weaving is a craft practice of ‘embodied skills’, in the way that the combination of body, mind and environment is crucial to the production of objects. ‘Embodied skills’ will be discussed in Chapter Four, from a comparative perspective as well as through focusing on the particular characteristics of Yuanli rush-weaving. The value and virtue of rush-weaving will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to the tension between tradition and innovation in rush-weaving.

Chapter Three

The process of rush-weaving becoming ‘heritage’

In this chapter, I look into the process by which Yuanli weavers and their products were gradually recruited into the emerging heritage movement initiated by the government, and the contradictions that this transformation caused. This phenomenon, related to the construction of heritage in Taiwanese society from the 1970s onwards, I refer to as the ‘heritage movement’. I argue that for the Yuanli people, having their rush-weaving practice and culture designated as ‘heritage’ is not necessarily positive, especially for the weavers. Given that the heritage status has attached new meanings to the practice of weaving, and even given rise to disputes, most weavers have retained their own practices relating to production, as a commitment to the past. As I shall argue throughout the rest of this thesis, how the weaver has faced this transformation is part of the long-term process, within which the weaver and her practice have interacted with the broader socio-economic context.

I first of all examine the political contexts which engendered the heritage movement in Taiwanese society. Against the backdrop of the political contexts of the heritage movement, I turn to look at Yuanli people’s perception of the phenomenon in which rush-weaving production, rush-woven objects and weavers are regarded as ‘heritage’. I try to understand what it means for Yuanli people to have their livelihood understood as ‘heritage’, and how the notion of heritage works in local society. I further investigate the consequences of rush-weaving becoming heritage, whereby people inevitably draw connections between rush-weaving as it was in the past with its present situation. I then move on to explore the impact of rush-weaving becoming heritage on the weaver’s practice of weaving, and I find a tension between tradition and innovation in rush-weaving production. At the end of this chapter, I examine the contradictions embedded in the process of rush-weaving becoming heritage.

Rush-weaving as heritage is embedded in the weaver’s practice of weaving. The

weaver, unlike an archaeological object or a historical building (*c.f.* Fontein 2006; MacDonald 2009), is an animate being, who has thoughts and can express her opinion and feelings. Thus, I suggest that the process by which rush-weaving becomes heritage, in which the weaver is intimately involved, is very different. Its consequences are not only about how people perceive a subject matter being designated as heritage, but about the weaver herself being the subject matter of heritage. Also, there is the relationship between the weaver and her practice of weaving, and how this relationship is affected after becoming 'heritage'. In this chapter, I will show how all these complex situations are associated with each other.

I attempt to show the specificities of a Taiwanese case as it highlights the connection between a craft and the notion of heritage, by careful exploration of the Yuanli case, as well as by comparison with other similar situations. In terms of the notion of heritage, although many researchers have argued that the purposes for which heritage is constructed reflect present concerns (see below), in terms of contemporary Taiwan, heritage is necessary both for the nation and for its people, as they emerge from particular postcolonial conditions. By illustrating the detailed political contexts of the heritage movement, I attempt to point out that, overall, rush-weaving as heritage is not so much related to – though it actually existed – the heritage industry in association with tourism, but is more connected to the complicated colonial histories of Taiwan. This is, I believe, an aspect of the Taiwanese context which should be of interest to comparative studies and to anthropology in general.

The political contexts and the emergence of the notion of heritage

Heritage is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 7), and a specific way of interpreting and utilising bygone times that links individuals with a larger collective. It no longer merely connotes heredity and the transfer of possessions, but includes roots, identity, and sense of place and belonging (Hoelscher 2006: 200). Heritage is a thoroughly modern concept and a condition of the late twentieth century. People have constructed heritage because they have a cultural need to do so in our modern age

(McCrone 1995: 1). Heritage is better analysed as a field in which competing groups and interests seek to establish or undermine orthodoxies (Lumley 2005 [1994]: 23). In other words, all heritage is constructed and can be manufactured, created and recreated for the purposes of those who claim it (Graburn 2001). Heritage can be a commodity (Hewison 1987: 9) and an enterprise (Lumley 2005: 15), in other words, an industry. As Robert Hewison asserts, instead of manufacturing goods, Britain, a country obsessed with its past, is manufacturing *heritage*, a commodity which nobody seems able to define but which everybody is eager to sell (Hewison 1987: 9, emphasis original).

The development of Yuanli rush-weaving from the Japanese colonial period to the present has constantly been influenced by the various policies and actions inaugurated by the state. Rush-weaving and its transformation into heritage is no exception. This transformation can be traced to two conflicting political dynamics: Sinicisation led by the KMT, and indigenisation closely associated with the DPP (see Introduction for KMT and DPP).

The political context in the 1970s prompted the KMT to reinforce its policy of Sinicisation in Taiwanese society. Wu (2008)¹ has pointed out that the Chinese Nationalist rule over Taiwan was precarious in the 1970s. Among the international community, the KMT's Republic of China (see Introduction for details) was no longer regarded as the sole legitimate government of China by the United Nations, as of 1971. Thus, it sought the legitimacy of ruling Taiwan from inside Taiwanese society. Subsequently, the Council for Cultural Affairs was set up, which worked out the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act. Meanwhile, Taiwanese history and culture, which had long been ignored in the past, were brought to the fore. However, the KMT's intention, through interpreting history, was to make Taiwanese culture and history part of Chinese history. After all, it aimed to emphasise the connection between China and Taiwan, and thereby to legitimate the KMT regime's rule over Taiwan (Wu 2008: 2-5).

¹ Wu is a historian who specialises in Taiwanese history, especially the Japanese colonial period, and at the time when he presented this paper, he was the director of the National Museum of Taiwanese History.

By the end of the 1970s, the indigenisation (*bentuhua*) movement had been initiated. Hsiao is a Taiwanese sociologist whose research focuses on the exploration of the social and political meanings of indigenisation from the 1970s onwards. He argues that indigenisation is essentially different from the nativism of the 1970s, because the latter was a reaction to westernisation which pursued Chinese nationalism, in spite of its emphasis on localisation. In contrast to Sinicisation, the indigenisation movement in the 1980s was a Taiwanisation movement, which emphasised the significance of a separate Taiwanese culture rather than consider Taiwan as an appendage of China. Thus, Hsiao refers to the indigenisation movement as ‘Taiwanese cultural nationalism’ (1999, 2000, 2005a, 2005b). Initially, it was a political movement in which Taiwanese people pursued democracy in the dictatorial and totalitarian rule of the KMT.² Later on, it expanded from a political movement into literature, textbooks and curriculum reform, and broader social movements in relation to language and ethnic identity (see Makeham and Hsiao 2005, Wang 2005, Harrison 2009, Thompson 2009). Reflecting on studies of indigenisation, I assert that indigenisation, at the core, acted as a counter to Sinicisation and always emphasised Taiwanese culture and history.

I suggest that, it is in the context of indigenisation that Taiwanese culture started to be connected to the notion of heritage. Considering the development of the notion of heritage in Taiwanese society, the dynamic relationship between the notion of heritage and political transformation meant that the law and practice of the preservation of heritage in Taiwanese society was reviewed and renewed in different periods. The notion of heritage was introduced to Taiwanese society by the Japanese colonial authority, by applying the Japanese law, ‘The Act of Preservation of Historic Sites of Scenic Beauty and Natural Commemoratives’ (*Shihji Mingsheng Tianranjinianwu Baocun Fa*) to Taiwan in 1922. This law included cultural and natural heritage, but did not involve any ‘intangible heritage’ (see below for

² People who led these social movements in pursuit of democracy went on to found the DPP. The DPP was in power in central government between 2000 and 2008 and further worked on the nation-building project, which was a development of the indigenisation movement. That is why the indigenisation movement is closely associated with the DPP.

definition), such as Yuanli rush-weaving. In 1945, the KMT, when it fled from China, brought the 'Antiquities Preservation Act' (*Guwu Baocun Fa*) into force in Taiwan, though no action was taken under this act (Lin 2009). In 1982, the 'Cultural Heritage Preservation Act' (*Wunhuazihchan Baocun Fa*) was announced (most recently amended in 2005). In Article 3 of the Act, it is stated that: the 'cultural heritage' referred to in this act shall be understood to comprise the following items of historic, cultural and/or artistic value, including: first, historic sites, historic structures, traditional gathering habitations; second, archaeological sites; third, cultural vestiges; fourth, distinctive arts of an ethnic group or locale; fifth, folk customs and related cultural artefacts; sixth, antiquities; and seventh, vistas of natural culture. The act was amended several times and the latest one was in 2005 (Cultural Heritage Preservation Act). Previously the preservation of heritage, both in terms of world heritage and in the Taiwanese context, emphasised the peculiarity of each heritage (i.e. its extraordinary qualities); however, currently, the culture of common people is regarded as heritage (Lin 2005). In addition, there is the emphasis on Taiwanese culture in the indigenisation movement, which is connected to living in a specific environment comprised of natural and cultural characteristics and had been neglected under the previous period of Sinicisation. Because of the above situation, craft production, as part of this common heritage, is regarded as being traditional arts and cultural property.

In terms of the meaning ascribed to 'intangible heritage', William Logan suggests that it is heritage embodied in people rather than in inanimate objects (2007: 1). Also, UNESCO defines intangibility as 'the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage' (UNESCO 2003). I argue that Yuanli rush-weaving belongs to the intangible heritage of Taiwan, which contains the above meanings. The idea of intangible heritage of Taiwan is relatively new to Taiwanese society and very different from the tangible heritage such as historic structures and antiquities, which are better known among Taiwanese people.

In 1992, a rush-weaver named Ke Jhuang-man was given the *Sinchuan Jiang*

(Heritage Award) by the Ministry of Education under the KMT government. This Heritage Award is, I suggest, similar to the concept of National Living Human Treasure of the UN, National Living Treasure of Korea, Important Intangible Cultural Property of Japan, and Bearer of Popular Craft Tradition of the Czech Republic. *Sinchuan Jiang* was given to 132 persons and 42 groups over ten years, between 1985 and 1994, in which Ke Jhuang-man was the only craftswoman of rush-weaving among the winners of this award. I suggest it was according to the above mentioned Cultural Heritage Preservation Act that rush-weaving was regarded as the ‘distinctive arts of an ethnic group or locale’ (Article 3 of the Act, the forth category of cultural heritage) and therefore the weaver was given the award. Although Ke Jhuang-man did not live in Yuanli – but in Dajia – her practice of rush-weaving is exactly the same as that practiced by the weavers of Yuanli.³ Thus, I suggest that it is during the 1990s when rush-weaving started to be treated as ‘heritage’ by the state.

If the award of *Sinchuan Jiang* to Ke Jhuang-man was the beginning of rush-weaving being regarded as heritage, afterwards, I suggest, there was a move from the recognition of the individual to the spread of the idea of rush-weaving as heritage in local society. Between 1997 and 1999, events described as cultural festivals were held in Yuanli every year with the support of government subsidies, and rush-weaving was always the theme of the event. In particular, in 1998, a cultural festival entitled ‘A town where the rush fills the air with fragrance – Yuanli’ was held by the Miaoli County government and lasted for seven days.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in neither Mandarin nor Taiwanese language is there a term equivalent to the meaning of ‘heritage’ in English. The meaning of heritage in English is close to ‘*wunhua zihchan*’ (cultural property) in Mandarin. In daily conversation, I never heard Yuanli people talk about the idea of ‘heritage’ in relation to rush-weaving. Only on special occasions, for instance, when they were talking to tourists or to me, who was studying rush-weaving as a livelihood and as ‘heritage’, would they use ‘*thoan-thong*’ (tradition), ‘*te-hng e bun-hoa*’ (local culture, meaning our own culture) in the Taiwanese Holo language, or ‘*chuancheng*’ (passing

³ Dajia is a neighbouring town to the south of Yuanli. See Introduction for the complicated relationship between Yuanli and Dajia in respect of rush-weaving.

down to posterity) in Mandarin. But Yuanli people in everyday conversation seldom used any of these terms. In other words, these terms related to the notion of heritage were largely ‘foreign’ to Yuanli people but introduced to them only recently.

Even though the heritage movement was initially inaugurated by two completely opposite political forces, it worked in a continuous way to push rush-weaving toward the direction of becoming heritage. While the state employs the notion of heritage in order to achieve its political goals, for people whose lives, experiences, and memories are intimately connected to the ‘heritage’, the meaning and impact of becoming heritage are extremely complicated and certainly different from the state’s intention.

Perceptions of the transformation: ‘we want to pass it down’ vs. ‘it does not work’

Identifying rush-weaving as heritage was originally initiated by the state and then subsequently practiced by Yuanli people. Yuanli people had two different, if not opposite, opinions on the transformation of rush-weaving into heritage. While some people accepted the transformation, others did not consider it meaningful at all. For those people who accepted rush-weaving as heritage, they agreed with the notion of heritage as promoted by the state. I call them as the ‘revivalists’. These revivalists tended to be influenced by the state’s thoughts, usually because they followed government programmes and applied for subsidies. In addition, the revivalists had their own agenda other than merely following the state’s policies. Their feelings, that is, the emotional connection they felt with their own place and rush-weaving, motivated them to take action instead of witnessing the demise of rush-weaving. They witnessed the decline of the rush-weaving industry and wanted to revive it in order to improve employment locally. Also, they want to preserve it for posterity by way of cultural transmission, that is, to pass down the skills, knowledge, and culture of rush-weaving from generation to generation.

In order to explore the meanings of the relationship between heritage and rush-weaving in contemporary Yuanli society, I examine what the revivalists do by

focusing on the development of rush-weaving in the Shanjiao Community Development Association, one of the organisations where people worked towards rush-weaving becoming heritage. Geographically, the Shanjiao Community is roughly equal to the Shanjiao Village, where around two thousand people lived. Among them, about one hundred people regularly participated in community affairs. The association was set up in 1993 and has been working on discovering and introducing the cultural heritage, natural heritage and special industrial cultures to all residents of the community. Historically, Shanjiao was the centre of the 'inner area' (see Introduction for details) and it was the place where the market was located and goods were gathered, including rush-woven products. At the time of its establishment, the Shanjiao Community Development Association aimed to evoke the residents' enthusiasm to get involved in treasuring local culture and objects. In recent years, the association made an effort to revive the rush-weaving industry, which they believed to be a chance for developing the economy of the community.

Ia'p Bun-hui was the president of the Shanjiao Community Development Association during my fieldwork. After he retired from being a teacher in a local primary school, he became deeply involved in community affairs. He had ambitions toward reviving the rush-weaving industry. To achieve his goal, he set up a rush-weaving workroom in the community. In the workroom, with government subsidies, about ten weavers were employed to produce rush-woven objects for orders. Because I was a rush-weaving apprentice in the workroom and frequently attended the events hosted by the community association, I was therefore able to talk with Ia'p Bun-hui and he also liked to exchange ideas about rush-weaving with me. Later on, I also interviewed him in order to learn his thoughts on rush-weaving and community affairs comprehensively. In the interview, he illustrated his blueprint of revitalising the rush-weaving industry:

I want to revive the rush-weaving industry. After all, it produces economic merit. Previously people stopped weaving, as there was no more economic value. But now the fresh demand of products is up, and people are again involved in producing. Last year we held a series of training classes, and thirty to forty people came to participate. It is easy for weavers to change; it depends on what is demanded in the market place.

As for what motivated him with such enthusiasm to work towards reviving the

industry, he said to me,

There are few factories in Shanjiao Village. If the rush-weaving industry is revitalised, it will ensure the economic prosperity of residents. I hope rush-weaving will eventually become the driving force to push the local economy forward. In turn, the younger generation will be involved in this industry. At that time, it will no longer be the case that only elderly residents are weaving, because we can hand on the baton to the next generation.

In the above conversation, Ia'p Bun-hui treated rush-weaving as a real industry, that is, in Robert Hewison's term (1987), in opposition to the heritage industry. In other words, Ia'p Bun-hui considered the economic benefits that rush-weaving can bring as craft production and a cash enterprise. In addition, he was passionate about collecting, studying, and preserving rush-weaving as local culture. As he said in the interview,

Rush-weaving is a traditional industry. It has declined over the past two to three decades, and gradually it is vanishing. We feel it is a pity, as it is the traditional craft in this region.

Thus, he collected literature on rush-weaving and recruited residents who were university students to shoot videos of master weavers' practicing weaving. He not only valued the history of rush-weaving culture, but also looked towards the future, for instance, in the way that he connected the weavers and the students from the primary school:

In respect of passing down skills, since last year we have cooperated with Shanjiao Elementary School. Rush-weaving is integrated into the curriculum in the course on native culture, and a rush-weaving society has been set up in the school. Students come to the community centre to take the rush-weaving class, and weavers from the workroom instruct them.

Weavers normally did not use the phrase '*chuancheng*' in their daily conversation. *Chuancheng* is a Mandarin term referring to the action of passing down valuable culture to the next generation. Nevertheless, weavers who worked in the community workroom said to me, 'it is very important to pass down rush-weaving.' This occurred in the first few days of my being an apprentice rush-weaver in the community workroom, and I had not even asked them any questions. I believe it is because they knew that I was from a British university and was there to study rush-weaving in order to complete my PhD. But the fact is that there is no such term as 'to pass down' in the Taiwanese Holo language, which was the weavers' mother tongue. So they always turned to use the Mandarin term, *chuancheng*, to refer to 'passing

down', whereas the rest of the conversation was in the Holo language. Thus, I suggest that, in the community workroom, weavers were trained to use the idea of *chuancheng*, that is, the cultural transmission of rush-weaving.

However, not all Yuanli people were happy to accept the idea of rush-weaving as heritage. Many of them did not expect that things done by people like Ia'p Bun-hui would revive the rush-weaving industry and transmit cultural legacies from past to future generations. Chiong Chhiu-hiong, who used to run the hats-and-mats business on a large scale in the 1960s and 1970s, has worked with his family in their own dumpling shop for the last twenty years. He opened this restaurant during the last years of his hat-and-mat business, as he knew that it would not last long. I visited their dumpling restaurant at around seven o'clock in the evening; they were a bit busy but not too many customers were in the restaurant. When there was a moment where there were no more guests, Chiong Chhiu-hiong, his wife, and their son⁴, sat down and talked to me about their hat-and-mat business and their feelings about it. This conversation is significant as it expresses the subtle and complicated feelings shared by most Yuanli people who have lived through the 'golden age' of the rush-weaving industry:

Chiong Chhiu-hiong: Nowadays nobody is making rush-woven objects anymore, and you are going to take this as your research topic?

Me: But aren't the hat-and-mat shops in the streets are still open?

Chiong's wife and son: Those were made in China!

Chiong's son: I bet you all of them are from China. Very coarse! [After saying this, he went upstairs and then went out to another house to find some objects for me. He came back shortly.] This cup pad is for you. You are doing the research. It is best that someone wants the object for which we have no use.

Me: When did you run the hats and mats business?

Chiong's wife: Our business is already part of the older generation.

Me: Did you keep some things as mementos?

Chiong: We sold as many objects as we could. What is a memento for?

Me: What do you think about contemporary rush-weaving?

Chiong: Presumably no one is making it now. Some of the shopkeepers import things from China. Indeed, it is Yuanli people who went there to teach them how to produce in the early days. And businessmen buy products in China and come back to sell in Taiwan.

Me: What do the younger generation think about it?

Chiong: Nothing. No special feeling. They can't make them at all – these types of produce had disappeared before they were even born.

⁴ Chiong and his wife were in their sixties or seventies, and their son was middle-aged.

Me: Have you been to the Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall?

Chiong: No. It won't really work.⁵ Nowadays everything is for developing tourism, that kind of thing.

Chiong: Rush-woven objects are very good things. We cannot help that they don't exist any more.

I learned a lot from the Chiong family during our conversation. Not all of what they said corresponds to the current situation of the rush-weaving industry. For instance, a few Yuanli weavers still make products that are sold in the shops and therefore, although the majority of items come from China, not everything does. This misinformation may be because they had left the industry over two decades ago and were not familiar with the transformation of the industry, which reinforces my argument that what happens in the rush-weaving industry is not always visible and straightforwardly comprehensible to non-practitioners (see Chapter Two). But what makes this conversation significant is that it expresses the intense emotion the Chiong family had toward rush-weaving.

Throughout our talk, all three of them still found it inconceivable that I wanted to study contemporary rush-weaving, something they thought completely unnecessary. For them, the present situation is: no weaver is making objects locally; everything being sold is imported. In this case, what is the point of conducting research on such an industry? Indeed, they were not the only people who doubted my motivation for research when I was in the field.

Tan Bin-tat was a male resident in his sixties. He has never been involved in the hat-and-mat business. However, living in Yuanli for all of his life, he knew a good deal of things about the rush-weaving industry. I met him for the first time through another friend's introduction. After I told him about my research, he said to me very seriously:

If you think about it – an old woman who is already over eighty still sits on the ground, hunches her back, and weaves items. In fact she has got poor eyesight and can hardly see her objects. So she weaves just according to her touch and experience. And her work, a mat of such a fine grain, is paid less than one hundred dollars!⁶ What is that for?

⁵ I think what he meant was that the operation of the TREH could not revitalise the rush-weaving industry.

⁶ NT\$100 is about £2.

I was shocked by his words, as what he said was exactly true and I was unable to give him any answer. The day after our encounter, I unexpectedly received a phone call from Tan Bin-tat. He said to me, very generously,

I thought about it carefully after our encounter yesterday. I think it is very good that someone like you comes to study Yuanli rush-weaving. I have a schoolmate, who used to run one of the several largest companies in this industry. I visited him this morning and he happened to be drying his old stuff in the sun, as the weather was nice. I think it is good if you can visit him and ask him questions. Let us do the research together and help you to finish your thesis.

His words cheered me up. However, afterwards, for a long time, I was still struck by what he had said when we first met. Throughout my fieldwork I always remembered vividly the scene he had described.

People like Chiong Chhiu-hiong and Tan Bin-tat believed that the effort of reviving the industry and passing down rush-weaving skills would eventually be in vain, as they knew the reality of rush-weaving industry, i.e. if an elderly weaver's earnings were so poor, how could the younger generation possibly be persuaded to devote themselves to working in this industry? I suggest that they were aware, as I also was, of the contradiction of rush-weaving as heritage, with high symbolic value, versus its status as a commodity with low economic value (*cf.* Venkatesan 2009a). The majority of residents were like Chiong Chhiu-hiong and Tan Bin-tat, and the minority were similar to Ia'p Bun-hui. I suggest it is not because the former did not identify with rush-weaving as their own culture. Rather, it is an expression of their intense concern for rush-weaving. They felt a gap when they compared the past with the present, and therefore were upset when they witnessed the current situation. I suggest this is both the consequence of, and intensified by, the process of rush-weaving being transformed into heritage. It is these complicated emotions that I now turn to.

Connecting the past and the present: contradictory feelings

In this section, I attempt to understand why the meanings ascribed to the past have become an issue and why Yuanli people have started to talk about it in the present,

and I suggest that the issue of the relationship between the past and the present emerges particularly when a craft is connected with heritage. The state caused rush-weaving to become heritage, thus emphasising the historical and cultural value of rush-weaving. Consequently, the historical past of rush-weaving is celebrated. This transformation prompted those residents of Yuanli who were over forty years old, and had experienced the prosperous years of the rush-weaving industry, to recall their past as it related to rush-weaving. The 'past' of rush-weaving, in terms of Yuanli people, does not indicate a clear-cut period, but in most part means the heyday of the rush-weaving industry. Because Yuanli people of different generations had experienced different periods of the industry, it really depended on their age, which time period they recalled. Generally speaking, the golden days of the rush-weaving industry ranged from the Japanese colonial period (1890s-1940s) to the 1980s, in which the industry fluctuated but never really went all the way into decline, such as was suffered after the 1980s. I will show that, in most cases, Yuanli people talked about their involvement in the golden days of the rush-weaving industry, and how their lives had benefited greatly from the industry, and I believe their description is a communal form of remembering rather than a historical reality.

The 'past' has been studied by numerous historians, sociologists, and anthropologists. It is argued that the past is contingent and disorderly, patterned only by hindsight, and that it is perceived through memory, with which it constantly interacts, and through historical contexts, whose fixity distances us from them (Lowenthal 1996: 207). The past is not an absolute quantity but a relative set of values (Hewison 1987: 135). A historian, David Lowenthal, believes that the past is a foreign country (1985) whose features are shaped by today's predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges. It is no longer the presence of the past that speaks to us, but its pastness (Lowenthal 1985: xvii). In terms of the representation of the past, Kevin Walsh suggests that, it emerges due to the experience of industrialization and urbanization which destroyed for many people this organic, or contingent, past. The sense of past developed by the new urban mass was the one that had to be created (Walsh 1992). However, based on the following analyses I argue that the meaning of the past for Yuanli people is less so in Walsh's terms, but

coincides more with what Jong and Rowlands argue in drawing on the African cases, that struggles over the meaning of the past are common in postcolonial states (2007).

Examining the issue of the connections between a craft and the notion of heritage from a comparative perspective, I found that the Japanese traditional silk weaving industry in Nishijin, Kyoto has many similarities with Yuanli rush-weaving. Tamara Hareven (2002) explored the family and work of the weavers, and captured a way of life that is rapidly disappearing. Hareven attempted to find out why the highly skilled craftspeople that she interviewed had a sense of impending doom. Since 1980, Nishijin has started to face an unprecedented crisis and has experienced an economic depression that threatens its survival. Because of the crises, even the most highly skilled weavers, for whose services manufacturers competed during good times, described their work lives as 'hand-to-mouth'. For Nishijin weavers, irregular orders from the manufacturers were the norm rather than the exception. Under these circumstances, weavers strove to maintain their craft and their family's livelihood in the unpredictable world of industry and trade on which they depended. (Hareven 2002: 41). The situation is very similar to that of Yuanli rush-weaving.

The 'past' in Yuanli people's perception of rush-weaving

Most of those in Yuanli over the age of forty had at some time been involved in the rush-weaving industry. For most of them, working in the rush-weaving industry was considered a demanding but rewarding occupation. I heard the following description of the history of rush-weaving in the Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall (TREH), but it is certainly not the only time I heard the story. Rather, it is the account that almost every person I met produced in conversation.

In my childhood, tuition fees always came from my mother's hands, as she wove one mat after another and one hat after another. It is through the rush-weaving industry that Yuanli children have had the opportunity to receive education at school.

The staff member, drawing on her personal memories, told this story not only from her position as a museum employee but also from her experience as a Yuanli resident for almost fifty years. She had experienced the heyday of the rush-weaving industry,

and had it embedded in her memory. Like the TREH staff, when most residents talked about their memories of rush-weaving and its connection to life in the past, their stories always expressed the importance of the mother as a weaver, and the immense gratitude they had toward their mothers. Many people's stories were pretty much like the one below, which my master weaver told me when I learned weaving from her:

In times past, earnings from rush-woven mats would buy tons of rice for the whole family, and weaving a patterned mat was a pleasant and rewarding occupation⁷. In those days, an ordinary family would be happy if they had meat to eat once or twice a month. Men worked in the mountains, collected firewood and made charcoal – even so they were not able to provide their family with meat. My friend's mother, who had lost her husband in her twenties, had never remarried. She stayed in her room everyday but her children had meat in their meals! It's because she wove hats and mats. If she spent twenty days making a mat, it would bring in a large amount of money. The vendor who collected hats and mats came to her house and would pay her there and then. Neighbours all knew when the vendor gave her the money: it was more than a man would earn for manual work in twenty days! For the twenty days she would always stay in her room and hardly took a rest. Two days of a man's manual work would earn less than her one-day of weaving did. With her hands, she supported the whole family and raised her children. Her son has a very high level of education. About thirty, forty years ago, a woman could support a family of seven or eight people on the proceeds of grass mat weaving. Men took manual work, but there was no income if it rained for twenty days or more; they wouldn't even be able to afford to smoke.

In this story, there is a clear female figure, a woman and a mother, whose earnings from weaving not only contributed to family subsistence, but usually became the principal source of income. While other families had only basic food, a weaver's family enjoyed the luxury of meat and fish. In the past, not every child would have the opportunity to receive a school education, especially girls. Going to school would increase family expenses, whereas staying at home meant they could be of great help to the family, either working in the field or weaving objects for sale. However, a weaver could pay for her children to receive education at school and even to study abroad. Those weavers who became widows often took on sole responsibility for the family's subsistence, with the family entirely reliant on the weaver's hands and extraordinary weaving skills.

A weaver was able to support the whole family and provide her children with good

⁷ It is because patterned mats earned more.

food and education because at the time, I suggest, there was a balance between a weaver's work and her earnings. That is, the weaver's earnings were good enough to cover, sometimes with considerable surplus, the family's living expenses. Meanwhile, she could take care of the housework. Thus, weaving was indeed an ideal occupation. Another of my master weaver's life experiences serves as a good illustration. She was in her fifties when I conducted my fieldwork, and her memories extended back thirty or forty years:

The price of hats and mats was highest when I was a girl. After getting married, my husband and I earned the same amount of money. However, apart from weaving, I had more work including raising children, growing vegetables, and raising pigs and chickens. People like me who wove hats and mats could earn several hundred dollars a week, which is equal to several thousand dollars today.⁸ I always put money in a drawer in my bedroom, and took a hundred dollars when I needed to go to the market. In the market I always spent less than a hundred dollars, every time. It took me just ten dollars to buy a really big sack of the little red, pickled fish.

Life and work in the past, in relation to the rush-weaving industry, was hard but rewarding. Owing to the high price of the rush-woven products, not only the weavers but also other practitioners (i.e. processors and merchants) benefited from the prosperous industry. Certainly, hardship remained in people's memories, as exhaustion and prosperity always went hand in hand. The first story below came from a couple, Ten An and his wife, who worked as processors of rush-woven products:

In the past, when the industry was flourishing and products were sent here to be processed in large amounts, the two of us worked and worked, and we did not even have time to have a meal. My hands and feet trembled, but I still didn't dare to get up as I was afraid of wasting time.

A female retail shopkeeper, Khu Siu-lin, who worked with her husband in the third generation of their family business, recalled the challenging circumstances of the thriving industry:

In the past, there were weavers in every family, in the whole housing area along the whole stream, from the upper to lower valley. In my grandfather's time [about 1920s], he had a shop and hired more than ten vendors to collect products from weavers. When I was first married and came to this shop [in 1985], vendors came to deliver the products – thousands of hats at a time!

⁸ NT\$1000 equals to £20 in the present.

A former export trader in the rush-weaving industry, Chhoa Ki-kian, showed me how flourishing the business was and how people worked at the time, when I interviewed him in his house:

All of the business of our Chhoa family was about export trade, rather than domestic business. For domestic business, you never knew what to produce until you received orders from Japan. In contrast, we always knew what we were going to sell every year. From October/November to April/May every year, it was the high season, and the whole house became a stockroom. Everyday, after vendors had delivered the products, my father and I had to stock take. As products were all over the place in the house, my father and I always had our dinner at midnight. It was only during the busy season for farmers that we had less stock. In winter, there was no [bright] sunlight here. We had our products sent to Kaohsiung [in the south] by lorry or train. In the past, exports were all made here in Taiwan and sent to Japan. In the heyday, exports were sent to Keelung [in the north] by train and then exported from there ... Dajia hats and mats have raised so many children! As long as there were two who wove in a family, the whole family could be supported.

From what people described to me, a vivid scene from the heyday of the industry appears: in every family, women and girls above seven or eight years old were all weavers, and a few men and boys also wove. In many fields people grew rush rather than rice, and on both sides of the road there were rush fields. At the time of the rush harvest, large numbers of children were hired as helpers or carriers. There were many vendors, and many more shops retailing rush hats and mats were found in the street than at present. All of the above memories make up the 'past' of rush-weaving, as remembered by the people of Yuanli. In the past, the growth of the rush-weaving industry promised abundance.

The 'present' of rush-weaving as perceived by the people of Yuanli

By contrast, few people in Yuanli today are satisfied with the current situation in the rush-weaving industry, and what I heard from both weavers and non-weavers was negative rather than optimistic. For instance, I once attended a series of training classes together with many senior weavers. These weavers, being skilful, were still eager to learn more techniques. At the end of one class, I talked with two of them, Ang-khi and Siu-sim, who were sisters, and they told me that: 'One can't earn money by weaving! The pay is low, and the price for the product is not good. We're

suffering'. Another weaver, Ten Siu-kheng, who was younger and good friends with the sisters, also attended the training class. She told me:

I don't expect the rush-weaving industry to have a better future. I think things will get worse. Through weaving one's earnings are meagre, but the work is hard. How much can one earn by making each single item?

Also, the vivid scene that Tan Bin-tat described to me, which I related earlier, conveyed the same kind of feeling. All of them expressed sorrow regarding the current conditions of the weavers and the industry. Due to the decline of the industry, demand had slumped. Additionally, the price of the product is relatively low. Thus, the earnings of weavers are not satisfactory.

In most cases, the weaver's exhausting manual work does not receive equivalent pay in return. The elaborate and unique handwork is not appreciated or purchased by the majority of society. I suggest that there is a tension or conflict between the rush-woven object as a handmade craft object and as a commodity. As a commodity, it has to compete with other products, which are mostly mass-produced and therefore much cheaper, and thus cannot be sold for a high price. However, considering the time and effort spent throughout the process of making each object delicately by hand, the price cannot be low if it is to represent the quality of a craft object. When the industry was prosperous and living expenses were low, the tension was less severe than it is in the present. More importantly, the weaver's pay is usually less than half, about forty percent, of the price of the product. The merchant and the processor gain the rest of the profit. In addition, the imbalance between the weaver's handwork and her earnings also comes from the fact that the present buyers are unable to distinguish ordinary work from skilled work. Therefore, buyers do not pay the amount that excellent work deserves. My master weaver was convinced of this, and consequently she changed her own standard of production. She does not make objects to the degree of skill that she did in the past, but only to approximately seventy percent of her highest standard.

Despite the poor remuneration, a small number of people still weave for their livelihood. Even though some weavers maintain their quality of work and make

delicate objects, they cannot avoid the impact that inferior products have had on the market. These goods are predominately imported from China by Taiwanese merchants, whereas some are made by Yuanli weavers. Products of poor quality appear in Yuanli because, along with the decline in the industry, the market is not as competitive as in the past. In the past, only objects of high quality would be purchased from weavers, and extraordinary products could demand a high price. At present, even though compared to the heyday of the industry demand has slumped, due to the limited number of weavers engaged in production the demand for rush-woven objects outweighs supply. Thus, merchants tend to buy whatever products are available, some of which are not carefully made and therefore not sufficiently delicate. In the shops, fine objects are usually outnumbered by and buried in amongst inferior goods, leading many to feel that all products are of poor quality.

Hence, the current situation in the weaving industry is a cause of distress for many in Yuanli. First of all, almost all weavers are elderly women, as none of the younger generation has joined the industry. Because of age, the weaver's physical condition is not good. Nonetheless, weaving is physically demanding. Above all, the weaver is poorly paid. People's sorrow comes from the bleak and desolate situation of the industry at present, in stark contrast to its prosperous past. The heyday of the weaving industry, its once prosperous condition, is often remembered wistfully. What is left behind is a group of elderly weavers who still need to earn a living through tiring manual work, but are not treated properly from the perspective of the weavers and many Yuanli residents. Because the industry has declined, the industry, the products and the weaver's skills have become 'useless' – this kind of argument was very common among Yuanli people whom I encountered. In spite of the transformation from 'useless' objects to 'heritage', the people of Yuanli have not witnessed any improvement in the situation of the weavers.

Contradictory feelings towards rush-weaving: layers of the past and unsettled heritage

Contrasting the past and the present, various contradictory feelings emerge in the perceptions that the people of Yuanli have of rush-woven objects, and the industry as

a whole. Although the industry faded and thereby the industry, objects, and the weaver's skill have become 'useless' from the perspective of a cash enterprise economy, people do not deny the good quality of rush-woven products (i.e. the merits of the object owing to its sweat-absorbing attribute and natural fragrance) and the industry has not therefore lost its meaning and significance in people's minds. Instead, people feel immense gratitude for rush-weaving. This is because the industry had, in the past, provided subsistence for an enormous number of people. They truly treasure the experiences and memories related to rush-weaving. Even though they keep saying that rush-weaving is useless, they cherish it above all other things. Also, because Yuanli people know how excellent it used to be, both in terms of elegance and the delicate grains, they are furious that poor, rough quality goods have been able to permeate the market.

Although Yuanli people are disappointed at the present condition of the rush-weaving industry (i.e. the weaver being poorly paid and the rough quality of the products) and are fully aware of the reality of the industry (i.e. young people not practicing and not many people making objects), they hope rush-weaving will continue. This is the dilemma that people face. If the elderly weavers stop weaving, Yuanli people will lose the remaining rush-weaving industry. But if they keep weaving, the miserable conditions of the weavers, and the industry as a whole, will continue to upset those for whom the heyday of rush-weaving holds so many memories.

It is these complicated emotions that make people constantly move between the past and the present, and become trapped in the contradictions or dilemmas which arise. And the more frequently they contrast the present with the past, the more contradictory their feelings. In the end, drawing on Sharon MacDonald's term (2009), 'layers of the past' of rush-weaving are revealed. In terms of rush-weaving, the past is at the same time tiring, poignant, delightful and rewarding. In the contrast between the present and the past, people were satisfied with the latter rather than the former. However, they did not neglect the fact that life in the past was difficult and that is why most girls became weavers. Being a weaver meant they lost many other opportunities, such as being educated in school.

In the formation of rush-weaving as heritage, it was rush-weaving, rather than other industries, that was chosen by Yuanli people to be the most important, if not the only, 'heritage' worth preserving. Rush-weaving is constructed as 'heritage' with symbolic meanings. The notion of 'manufacturing heritage', as AlSayyad argues, refers to the kind of physical environments produced 'with the planned intent of making them places for the deliberate representation of cultural tradition'. He emphasises that all these places are 'made', 'in the sense that they embody the clear objective of capturing, reconstructing, manufacturing, and possibly inventing social and built heritage' (AlSayyad 2001: 8). He further distinguishes tradition from heritage: 'if tradition is about the absence of choice, [...] heritage is then the deliberate embrace of a single choice as a means of defining the past in relationship to the future' (AlSayyad 2001: 14).

The heritage industry, as criticised by Hewison (1987), Wright (1985), and Lowenthal (1985, 1998), is regarded as dangerous to the development of a society. Hewison argues that, 'nostalgia is profoundly conservative. Conservatism, with its emphasis on order and tradition, relies heavily on appeals to the authority of the past.' (1987: 47) Nevertheless, I find Sharon MacDonald has provided a good way to balance the potential danger made by the heritage industry. In her discussion of difficult heritage, she raises the notion of 'unsettling heritage', which is a 'reflexive unsettlement' (MacDonald 2009). She is aware of the critiques made by people like Hewison,

designating it as heritage seems to accord it value and, unless carefully countered, to imply that it is being seen positively and even treasured. In other contexts it has been argued that heritage risks effecting a lulling, soporific, complacency. (MacDonald 2009: 190)

However, she argues that,

even in relation to heritage, the aim should be towards the anti-redemptory, the anti-monumental and even anti-heritage. In other words, the call here is for continual unsettlement. It is for opening up heritage – which, as we have seen, always risks settlement into a single frozen past – with what we might call the palimpsest effect. That is, (...) we seek to allow different layers of the past to appear, variably, through their later accretions, and in so doing to disturb, prod, and raise questions – that is, to unsettle fixity and heritage. (MacDonald 2009: 192)

Despite the fact that rush-weaving as the heritage representing Yuanli is manufactured, I have argued that from the perspective of people whose lives and rush-weaving are interwoven, the interpretation should go beyond the idea of manufacturing heritage. For these people, the situation is not merely akin to the critiques of nostalgia in the heritage industry, but is the reality that they actually experienced and remember, and thus rush-weaving as heritage is ‘unsettled’ (c.f. MacDonald 2009). While some people look backward concerning the values embedded in the past in rush-weaving, others look forward. This is where the dissonance arises.

Tradition or innovation?



A new design of handbag, using the ‘traditional’ pineapple pattern

In the process of becoming heritage, different ways of treating the past and questions about what is to continue emerge. This is the context in which ‘tradition versus innovation’ becomes an issue. I examine what ‘traditional’ and ‘innovative’ mean, respectively, and based on this I then explore the contradiction between rush-weaving as heritage and rush-weaving as an economic activity of craft production.

Anthropologists have pointed out that ‘tradition’ is never an explicit term but usually ambiguous and problematic. For example, Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin have argued, in their attempts to analyze national and ethnic identification in Quebec and Hawaii, that tradition cannot be defined in terms of boundedness, givenness, or essence. Rather, tradition refers to an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity. Tradition resembles less an artifactual assemblage than a process of thought – an ongoing interpretation of the past (Handler and Linnekin 1984: 273-4). In terms of ‘innovation’, recent researches emphasise the collaborative and political dimensions of creativity and challenge the idea that creativity arises only from individual talent and expression (Hallam and Ingold 2007). Nevertheless, I still need to employ these terms and to contrast tradition and innovation in order to point out where people of different thoughts diverge from each other.

Here I return to the comparison made earlier between Nishijin weavers and Yuanli weavers. One of the differences between the two is that, the highly skilled Nishijin weavers, who strongly identify with their work and tradition of silk weaving, are not recognised as Living National Treasures because they do not make and weave original designs, but one manufacturer and one designer had been awarded. In contrast to Nishijin, in Yuanli rush-weaving, the work of a weaver was recognised by the Heritage Award. However, this does not mean that ‘design’ is not an issue in Yuanli rush-weaving. I will show how the idea of design has become a central point in the contested relationship of tradition and innovation in rush-weaving.

The state’s imaginary plan versus the local reality

The conversation below reveals perfectly the gap between the state and local society. More importantly, it discloses the contradiction between rush-weaving as heritage and as craft production, the point to which I will return shortly. The National Taiwan Craft Research Institute (NTCRI) is the only governmental organisation that manages research and the promotion of crafts. In 2006, the NTCRI chose the TREH as one of the only five museums, among the 255 Museums of Local Culture, to be involved in a special programme. The programme aimed to revitalise the operation of

Museums of Local Culture.⁹ The NTCRI subsidised these five museums, and subsequently the five museums were expected to become the model for other museums nationwide. For this reason, people from these museums met in the NTCRI. With their proposals for this programme they explained what was going to be done and achieved under this project.

Tan Hui-hun was the person in charge of this project in the TREH. She was an employee of the Yuanli Farmers' Association¹⁰, where she used to work as a clerk in the banking department. When the Yuanli Farmers' Association established the TREH¹¹ in 2004, she was appointed as its director and indeed its only regular staff member. Although she had no background in museum work, she knew about rush-weaving. She was in her forties and had lived all her life in Yuanli. She learned rush-weaving when she was little, and thus had a basic knowledge of rush-weaving. Nevertheless, despite the fact that she had always been a Yuanli resident, she did not know much about which weavers were making objects on a day-to-day basis and what kinds of products they made. Only after she worked in the TREH, where she had to be in charge of the sale of rush-woven objects at the shop there, did she start to come into contact with weavers who lived in the various villages of Yuanli town. Since then, she has accumulated knowledge of each weaver's specialist products, i.e. one weaver might be good at weaving bed-mats, whereas another might be good at seat-mats. Through managing sales, she has also acquired a developed knowledge of the current situation in the rush-weaving industry. That is, she knows what the problems are and therefore what should be done to address them, notably: people of the younger generation are no longer learning the skills and the practices of the rush-weaving industry; weavers are aging, and fewer and fewer are practicing in the industry.

⁹ The reason why this institute thinks these museums need to be revitalised is related to the broader context in Taiwan, where the government used museums multi-functionally in order to solve every problem, such as developing rural villages and tourism. This strategy has partially contributed to the museum boom in the past two decades. However, a lot of problems have arisen: many museums are not truly needed in the local society, but people merely made use of government subsidies; some cannot function well for lack of funding; many have become empty buildings in the end. So, by the revitalising project, the institute hopes that these museums will function again in the future. The five model museums represent a starting point.

¹⁰ I have briefly described this organisation in the Introduction, and see Chapter Four for details.

¹¹ See Introduction for a brief description and Chapter Four for details.

As I had been working as a volunteer in the TREH and helped with conceiving the project, I went with Tan Hui-hun when she represented the TREH at this meeting. I did not play any role in the meeting but merely listened and took notes. When it was her turn, Tan Hui-hun briefly talked about the current operation of the TREH and the way in which she wanted to make the best use of the subsidy. After her presentation, a dispute between her and the director of the NTCRI broke out and gradually became fierce:

Director of the NTCRI: Which grandmother weaver is most famous?

Tan: We do not have 'superstar' grandmother weavers.

Director: Which community is most famous in rush-weaving?

Tan: Shanjiao community. Recently people from the community have just completed the refurbishment of a Japanese style accommodation for an elementary school.

Director: What kinds of problems are currently preventing the progress of your museum?¹² Is the rush-weaving industry unlikely to develop any further in the foreseeable future?

Tan: The weavers are aging. It is a problem in terms of passing down the skills.

Director: How do you guide and advise? Is it now the case that you are guiding elderly women to take up the occupation of rush-weaving?

Tan: At the moment, in the TREH, we are unable to guide and advise. Instead, we merely exhibit and sell objects.

Director: Do these elderly women have adequate income?

Tan: No.

Director: I'm concerned, are they just doing subcontracted handwork?

Tan: At the moment we are focused on considering ways in which the skills can be preserved. Our way is that when we buy products, we buy directly from the weavers, at a higher price than that of the market.

Director: In the end, crafts should become the art, an expression of the art of life and the art of handwork. Do you guide and advise the elderly people in terms of how to design?

Tan: Previously we had some orders from a telecom company and others. We produced a design in advance for the elderly weavers and then they made the products. We do indeed strive for orders which offer a higher price.

Director: But this is still subcontracting work. The weavers are still craftspeople.

Tan: Nowadays, there are a couple of young weavers who are creative in weaving; they teach weaving as well as make artistic work. It is difficult to ask weavers of the older generation to produce in the way that they do ... [Her speech was interrupted by the director.]

Director: Although producing artwork cannot provide an adequate income in terms of people's subsistence and the artwork might not be perceived well in the market, however, ...

Tan: [She interrupts the Director] Now we just strive for more funds for the

¹² What he meant was that, in terms of the operation of the museum, if it was not functioning well, what problems were the staff members facing?

operation of the TREH.

Director: How many classes are there in total in the three schools¹³?

Tan: There are not many classes in any of these schools, around thirty to forty classes in each school. But there are always chances.¹⁴

Director: Nowadays competition is a popular means. Competitors use the same material over the same period of time, the person who finishes first is the winner.¹⁵ Also, it attracts media attention and gets broadcast. Doing this, locals would be more motivated to participate.

Tan: Last year we held an event on a large scale, in which we invited university students to join the competition and set up installation artwork using rush material. And there were no limits placed on their creativity.

Director: But for everyone else, they just watched.

Tan: But through this event the young students can reflect on what triangle rush is.

Director: Only local universities were invited?

Tan: Universities in central Taiwan were included.

Director: For them, rush is merely one of many materials, and they do not necessarily have to choose this one.

Tan: But they would never have the chance to know what triangle rush is, if not for participating in this event.

Director: You should get more locals involved, and make rush-weaving known by many people outside of Yuanli.

Tan: For us, who run the Museum of Local Culture, we would, above all, consider sustainability, and then we can make an effort toward popularisation.

Director: You should have more imagination ...

Tan: [Silent]

The conversation ended in an unpleasant silence.

In the dispute between Tan Hui-hun and the director of the NTCRI, being an observer who was not involved in the conversation, I noticed a huge gap between the two sides. In the end, the TREH got the full subsidy from the NTCRI, but the gap remained. The thoughts of the director, as a government official, were obvious: crafts should become an art; the TREH should encourage the younger generation, rather than elderly women, to take up weaving as an occupation; elderly weavers, who were unable to design new products and lacked creativity, just did subcontracting handiwork, which was trivial or even valueless. The director was critical of Tan Hui-hun and the operation of the TREH, based, unfortunately, on his misunderstanding of

¹³ In the proposal for the project, Tan Hui-hun planned to hold activities which would involve students from three primary schools, where rush-weaving was included in the curriculum.

¹⁴ Her sentence stopped here. I think what she meant was that, as long as rush-weaving is taught in these schools, locals might optimistically expect the potential development of rush-weaving in the future.

¹⁵ I imagine what he meant is that, competition is a popular means for attracting the public attention and developing craft production, and fair competition can be achieved by the ways that he described.

the local reality.

Tan Hui-hun completely disagreed with the director's ideas. On our way back to Yuanli, she felt really upset. While the director thought becoming 'art' and having 'creativity' were the solution to everything, Tan Hui-hun knew that in reality, the priority was for the TREH to survive and for rush-weaving to continue. If nobody weaves, it is meaningless to talk about art and creativity in rush-weaving. Moreover, she appreciated what the weavers did, while the director looked down on the weavers. In Tan Hui-hun's mind, the elderly weavers were not at all like what was described by the director. For her, the meaning of design was completely different from the director's:

The new design all depends on the weaver's own variation. When they design something new, they would bring it over to show me. My work here contains many varied aspects; I am not able to design anything. I think the idea of design embraces a wide range, especially in contemporary society. In a word, it means to make something different from the previous styles. It could be the change in material, form, pattern, so on and so forth. As long as there is a balance between the limits which are acceptable both to the user and to the designer, the design works.

So, a gap emerges when the state's plans and thoughts ignore the reality in local society. The reality of the rush-weaving industry, as Tan Hui-hun pointed out, was that the younger generation were not learning the skills and joining the industry, the weavers were aging, and fewer and fewer weavers remained in the industry, and all these factors were being completely overlooked by the state. Additionally, the state, while seeking to turn rush-weaving into 'heritage', sought to blame people in local society, especially weavers practising rush-weaving, for their lack of ability to innovate. Tan Hui-hun disagreed with the state's opinion, and such disagreement existed among Yuanli people. That is, different opinions arose between the innovators (and the revivalists) and the 'traditional' weavers (and people who supported them).

The innovators and revivalists of rush-weaving

Those weavers who practice weaving as inherited from the previous generation, and

who believe it to be the correct way, I refer to as ‘traditional’ weavers. By referring to the ‘artist’ weaver or the innovator, I mean the weaver who disagrees with the ‘traditional’ way of weaving and embraces another set of values, including considering the standard of beauty to be the most important element in weaving, and so on. The revivalists are people who are passionate about revitalising the rush-weaving industry, either for economic reasons or cultural transmission. Sometimes the innovator and the revivalist overlap, as the innovator may be a revivalist and the revivalist may be involved in the process of innovation. In fact, innovators and revivalists were relatively rare among the majority of ‘traditional’ weavers. The tensions between the former and the latter are not due to innovators and revivalists failing to recognise the value of the ‘traditional’ weaver’s work, rather it is that they criticise the ‘traditional’ weaver as being unable or unwilling to innovate in rush-weaving, considering them capable of producing only fine and delicate objects.

Lu Gim-ha was the kind of weaver that I would refer to as an innovator. She was in her forties and generally acknowledged to be an excellent young weaver. Actually, she is a beautician by profession rather than a full-time weaver and, in a way, a newcomer to the rush-weaving industry. I first met her in the rush-weaving class that she taught in a local primary school. Afterwards, I visited her house, where she told me how she had become an ‘artist’ weaver quite by coincidence. ‘I was forced to practice rush-weaving and to become creative’, Gim-ha said to me. Around five or six years ago¹⁶, Gim-ha’s mother-in-law joined one of the weaving classes held by the Yuanli township office in each village during the evening. Her mother-in-law asked Gim-ha to join her in the class; Gim-ha replied that she was fed with all the weaving she had done when she was little. At that time her mother-in-law had no idea that Gim-ha already possessed the skills to create rush-woven objects. One day people from the township office went to their house and said, ‘the classes are almost at an end, but, after all these months, not one new piece of work has appeared.’ Hearing this, Gim-ha said to them straightforwardly, ‘the person who can achieve this is right in front of you.’¹⁷ Then she made several rush-woven objects for them.

¹⁶ Gim-ha told me this in 2006, so the time she mentioned is around 2000 or 2001.

¹⁷ She was the one. This was the sentence that Gim-ha replied to the people who had a conversation with her and her mother-in-law. She recounted their conversation to me.

As the series of classes came to an end, the media came to take photos of Gim-ha's work, and subsequently she was invited to teach rush-weaving in neighbouring towns. 'I can't always simply teach the same thing, so I keep thinking of new objects to make.'

Gim-ha liked to design and make new articles in rush-weaving. As she described it to me,

I love the feeling when I create something new, all by myself! The object is dead, but the human brain is alive. I racked my brains when I was developing a new piece of work, and I really suffered in the creative process, but I was extremely happy when I figured out what I wanted to make. At times, I was so excited that I couldn't fall asleep – I really amazed myself!

Sometimes Gim-ha used the new technique of drawing the draft by computer, for a new piece of rush-woven work, but all her knowledge of the ways of weaving was in her head, which was how weavers practised it traditionally. She said to me,

My husband said to me, 'you never wrote down the steps. Will you still know how to do it if you want to make it later?' And I replied, 'these things come from my own research and development, so I will never forget them!' Sometimes other weavers copy my works. Some of them even claim that they created them. Although I feel anguish when my designs are copied by others, I don't worry about imitation. This is because I spent a long time working on each object. Very seldom do people have such patience, unless they are particularly fond of doing it, and so the copy cannot be better than the original. Others' objects cannot be as delicate as mine. Besides, after they imitate my work, I will simply make another, brand new, piece of work.

Whenever Gim-ha finished a new design, and it had been released in an exhibition, for example, customers who liked or wanted the articles would order them directly. However, she did not like producing objects for orders and had no time for mass production. Instead, she asked the weavers who lived in the neighbourhood to produce them. Then she would collect them and modify the objects into the final shape, before handing them over to the customers. In this way, Gim-ha would design a new article and the cooperative weavers would complete the large scale orders.

Although Gim-ha was seen as an 'artist' weaver and she preferred making innovative works, she nevertheless had a good knowledge of the 'tradition' of rush-weaving, including skills, patterns, and the history of the industry. In other words, she paid her

respects to the ‘tradition’ of rush-weaving and the ‘traditional’ weaver; at the same time, though, she held a critical view towards them. Gim-ha, in answering my question about the kinds of products that she made, put them into three categories,

I still produce some objects in the traditional style with my own variations, such as handbags and seat mats. Another kind of thing I make is the artwork, for example a piece of framed work hung on the wall purely for appreciation, just like a mural. Also, there’s the practical handbag. In making this kind of object, I emphasise the variation of grains and the style. So I really need to pay attention to fashion. Besides, I made some traditional patterns and forms for my own reference and for the next generation. The patterns I made include the birthday peach, the peach blossom, the camellia, and so on.

When I asked her whether she knew why weavers made certain patterns but not others, she answered,

People wove patterns in order to make objects pretty and attractive. It is for variation. I think the patterns were designed by those people who developed the products. If people who saw the sample liked the patterns, they gave orders for the product. I still remember that, in the past, people would make handbags or seat mats for the whole year, if a particular handbag or seat mat was popular and in fashion that year.

Therefore, from what Gim-ha said, fashion not only mattered in the present, but it was also crucial in the past. Gim-ha actually appreciated the value embodied in objects made by weavers of the previous generation:

Objects made by weavers of the previous generation are fine in grain, and delicate; they manifest the weaver’s wisdom. These objects should be preserved. Nevertheless, in style these objects are too old-fashion and outdated. If someone sent me one as a gift, I would never dare walk down the street carrying it! For the previous generation, the pursuit of delicacy is important; nowadays, people prefer variation¹⁸ rather than delicacy of work. It does not have to be delicate; bold and wild are popular too. Recently, I made use of multi-materials in weaving a handbag. I catch up on the latest fashion, and I integrate into my weaving.

In addition to designing and making new articles for exhibition, competition, or customers, Gim-ha taught rush-weaving in school. Being able to weave properly and innovatively, Gim-ha had her opinion on the passing down of skills:

Something like hand-weaving can only survive by passing down the skills, and afterwards people can make variations. As long as it finds a way to be passed down in local society, I would do my best to promote it.

Hence, although she preferred making artistic works to teaching, she was willing to

¹⁸ It refers to expressions like uneven or irregular.

teach children in school in order to pass down rush-weaving skills. She was the current teacher of the rush-weaving class of Jhongjheng Primary School.¹⁹ With Gim-ha's consent, I attended the class a couple of times and learned weaving with the students. Fifth and sixth grade students came to the rush-weaving class once a week, with each class lasting forty minutes. There were three classes in each grade, and around twenty-eight students in each class. In class, Gim-ha let students separate into small groups, in which five or six students would work together. Group members cooperated to finish one piece of rush-woven work in every semester. Gim-ha told me that some teachers who were particularly interested, would, after dismissing their own classes, come along to learn.

Apart from teaching children in school, Gim-ha was frequently invited to instruct people in various training classes because she was an innovative weaver who impressed people with her creativity in rush-weaving. But, she disagreed with the way in which the training classes were carried out:

I can't always teach elderly women and grandmothers. Teaching them is not necessary at all. No matter how industriously I teach them, rush-weaving won't continue as these weavers are aging. Besides, in classes consisting mostly of grandmothers, I wonder if there are five or six out of twenty who are learning diligently. Others are just bored of their daily routine, so they attend the classes and get some free rush to weave. So what's the point of this kind of class? People, who are skilled and really need the earnings that weaving brings, would not come to the training classes. [A better way of developing the industry is that] we go to their places and then work on marketing their products. I would love to teach unemployed women, no matter if they are twenty, thirty or forty. If people want me to teach students from primary school, junior high school and senior high school, that's even better. I will teach these people anyway. But the thing is, the period of learning should be longer. It used to take three years and six months to accomplish learning certain skills. How can one learn rush-weaving in a couple of months? As long as two or three out of one hundred people, who come to learn, keep learning and weaving, it's passing down. But how much can you learn in just

¹⁹ The class was established in 1993. At the beginning, it was in the form of a club led by two teachers and it offered classes to students and teachers who were interested in learning weaving skills together. Since 2001, the school has incorporated rush-weaving as part of the curriculum. Apart from weaving classes, the school has held a rush-weaving competition in order to stimulate students' interests. In addition, students often take part in activities, exhibitions and national competitions outside the school. In some events these students instructed tourists in how to make rush-woven objects. In the teaching programme of the rush-weaving class, the aim of the class is stated: "We hope, through gaining experience of the rush-weaving process, students will develop strong feeling for and interests in these objects, and, in turn, that they will treasure and preserve this local speciality of Yuanli, enabling the declining rush-weaving industry to revive. We also expect, through participating in artistic activities, students will understand the character of native culture. Also, through artistic creation, they will express a rich imagination and creativity."

two or three hours? After all, skills should be passed down to the younger generation. Otherwise, what does ‘*chuancheng*’ mean?

For Gim-ha, making fashionable objects and passing down skills to the younger generation are the ways in which rush-weaving will truly continue. Gim-ha’s thoughts very much parallel those of MacDonald’s revivalists of Gaelic culture: ‘Gaelic is not just about the old folks. If it is to have a future it has to be about us too. That’s what we’ve got to change. We’ve got to say it’s not about a dying way of life’ (1997b: 159).

Ia’p Bun-hui, the president of the Shanjiao Community Development Association, is a revivalist of the rush-weaving industry. He illustrated his plan for revitalisation of the industry in my interview with him:

The way we revive rush-weaving will mean it is no longer a traditional practice, but will become diversified. We aim for multiple forms along with multimedia production. In so doing it will become vigorous and attractive. This is how we innovate. We hope to successfully establish our brand of rush-weaving this year. In my plan, the community workroom will play a role in designing and developing products, and weavers in groups of five or six will set up their own studios and encourage each other to improve their skills. I want the weavers to produce artistic and practical articles. And the quality of the products will be guaranteed. Therefore, in the past two years we held training classes which focused on innovation and employing multiple materials in weaving.

From what Ia’p Bun-hui’s said about rush-weaving, it seems that ‘tradition’ is the legacy from the past generations. However, it also implies that ‘tradition’ is dull and unattractive. In order to revive this traditional industry, he wanted to get rid of its dullness, and introducing the idea of design to weavers was the way of achieving this. Ia’p Bun-hui’s idea of design was about incorporation of various materials other than the rush, including leather, metal, cloth, etc. and various techniques apart from weaving, such as dying, metalworking, and so on. His idea of design was also about production under a brand, which is similar to the fashion industry. Objects made according to the design would become lively and attractive to customers.

Since 2004, Ia’p Bun-hui has put his thoughts into practice by setting up the rush-weaving workroom and holding design classes for weavers. The design classes were organised by the Shanjiao Community Development Association, which invited

university lecturers to introduce the idea of design and fashion to weavers. However, as I sat in on the classes with the trainee weavers, I found that it was really hard for weavers to understand and follow what the lecturers said. Ia'p Bun-hui was aware of the situation, and he always encouraged the weavers by saying that, 'That's all right. It is good enough if you can understand ten percent of what the lecturers say in class.' Besides, weavers normally did not discuss the idea of design, or even use the term, in their daily lives.²⁰

Both Ia'p Bun-hui and Lu Gim-ha wanted to innovate, but they had very different ideas of how to achieve it. Ia'p Bun-hui was not a weaver. He thought that the weaver in general did not possess sufficient awareness of design when they were weaving, and so he asked university lecturers to equip weavers with the idea of design. While Ia'p Bun-hui did it in this way, Lu Gim-ha thought it is unnecessary to teach the 'traditional' weavers how to design. Lu Gim-ha was an 'artist' weaver, and she designed her own works. Their definitions of the idea of design were also different. For Ia'p Bun-hui, it should be introduced from outside. For Lu Gim-ha, it came out of her own innovation in the process of thinking and weaving, though she also expressed the hope that, at some point in the future, she would have the opportunity to cooperate with a professional designer to create her work. Despite these differences, what they had in common is that they thought the 'traditional' weaver was unable and unwilling to innovate in rush-weaving.

It seems that the 'traditional' weaver has become the target of public criticism. All of these people, i.e. the government official, the innovator and the revivalist, considered that the 'traditional' weaver was unable to design and lacked creativity. Nonetheless, as I discussed earlier, Tan Hui-hun perceived the weaver's ability for design and creativity in a different way. I find the situation is similar to what MacDonald and Hirsch suggest: the idea of 'creativity', like 'tradition', is "far from certain" (2007: 187). While people have different definitions of creativity and design, they perceive the traditional weaver in the opposite way. However, in the opposition between tradition and innovation, I find the central issue for those on the side of innovation is

²⁰ However, I suggest that it does not necessarily mean that they did not have their own idea of design in mind and in practice. This is another issue that will be addressed later.

whether or not a weaver is able to design by using her creativity, whereas for the tradition side it is whether or not it is necessary to do so. Among the few weavers who were still making products for sale, there were far more ‘traditional’ weavers than ‘artist’ weavers. The ‘traditional’ weavers, I suggest, had a different view of the ‘tradition’ and practice of rush-weaving.

The ‘traditional’ weavers

Li Go’at-in was generally acknowledged to be an excellent weaver. She was seventy-six years old when I visited her in 2008. She was born into a family where she should not have had to practice rush-weaving. Go’at-in was the only child in the family and the family loved her dearly, so she was able to attend school at a time when only one or two girls in a village could pursue education. By the time she graduated at the age of thirteen, it was almost the end of the war, but the bombing from the fighter planes was still fierce. The family worried about her safety and stopped her studying further. She was locked in the house but had nothing to do. She picked up the unwanted rush left by others and made objects from it. It was then that she started her career in rush-weaving.

Go’at-in’s family background is not usual among weavers, whereas her attitude toward weaving is typical. When I visited her house and talked with her and her husband in their living room, she expressed her dissatisfaction with the recent development of the rush-weaving industry and the ‘artist’ weaver:

Nowadays, none of the young girls²¹ are as patient as we were. The girls now weave with the whole piece of rush²² – not one of them actually knows how to weave properly. The rush in objects made nowadays is loosely woven; the weavers fail to weave it closely together. In the past we always sat on the ground to weave, so the strands of the rush were all tightly interwoven. Previously I saw some girls were making *chhau-pan-a*²³, which I am sure nobody would want if

²¹ I think she referred to those who were at least above forty years old, as there was no one under this age who was learning to weave.

²² As I described in Chapter Two, the aesthetics of rush-weaving, especially among the senior weavers, is that the finer the better. In order to achieve that, a piece of rush should be split into several parts, which can then be used to weave fine objects.

²³ It is a small rush-woven piece. A rush-weaving apprentice should always start from using only a few pieces of rush to weave small pieces of mat-like object, repeatedly, until she is familiar with the basic skills of weaving. I practiced in this way for several weeks, when I started to learn how to weave

they sent it as a gift. I observed them for a while and finally could not stand it anymore, so I went to them, sat down, and wove in front of them. Afterwards, everyone was struck by the fact that I am aged but I am still able to weave in a way that is up to standard. I told them, 'This is my livelihood!' Earlier I was asked to produce a rush-woven cushion case, which was made according to the pattern designed by a university student. The pattern looked like a grille, and was very difficult to weave. What is such an awkward thing made for? For so many years, I did not see anyone who learned to weave properly. The shape of the objects that they made is neither round nor square. It is impossible to learn how to weave properly without suffering as you learn.

Tan Ang-khi was a weaver of almost eighty years of age. She made rush-weaving objects as a subsistence activity. The income from selling her products was crucial to maintaining her living standards. Without this income, her daily life would have been affected. Even though she was already at the age when most people can retire, she still wove every day. She took this occupation at the age of seven or eight and has engaged in this industry, without changing, ever since. It became her lifelong job. Being in the industry for over seventy years, she had witnessed its practice in various periods:

In the past, the merchant always brought the model of the handbag to my house, and I made the shape exactly according to the model. In this way, the article was much more beautiful. A product made without using a model is never beautiful. Now weavers make nonsensical things; I never understand them. Previously the quality of objects was better. Now the objects are rough. In the past, products were exported to Japan and were made as requested. Nowadays things are not carefully made.

When she compared how people practiced weaving in different periods, she revealed her own preferences, or to be precise, her worries. The use of a model supports the strands of rush and the object, in the process of shaping a solid form, such as a hat or a handbag. It was usually made of wood, and I was struck by the various types of models used when a processor of rush-woven objects showed them to me in his house, which was also his workplace. For a certain kind of product, a handbag for instance, there were more than ten differently shaped models, and there were three or more sizes available for certain particular shapes. The various models function to ensure standardisation in shape, (e.g. rectangle, trapezium, or ellipse) and size (large or small). After seeing these models, I fully appreciated what Tan Ang-khi meant. Nowadays weavers create whatever shape they want in making handbags or hats; it

properly.

is impossible to have a wooden model for each new shape. Some senior weavers made their own models by using cardboard, but others did not care about using models at all.

Apart from using a wooden model, Ang-khi also insisted on making the patterns properly. Ang-khi was frequently asked to perform weaving in the TREH, when an event was held. On one particular day, the Yuanli Farmers' Association held an event, and the TREH was involved. The event was to promote the things done by the Farmers' Association and aimed at attracting tourists. Some weavers, including Ang-khi, were asked to give a weaving demonstration, and some weavers, like Siu-kheng, were asked to teach tourists to make simple rush-woven toys. Ang-khi and Siu-kheng lived in the same village and were close friends, though Siu-kheng was thirteen years younger than Ang-khi. Throughout the event, Siu-kheng carried the rush-woven handbag that she had made, an object of pride. Seeing this, Ang-khi said to me,

I've always complained to Siu-kheng about the handbag she made for herself. The shape is not beautiful, and the pattern is made incorrectly. I told her to throw it away, and I'll make her a new one. Now I've already given her a new one that I made for her, but she still likes to carry the one she made.

For Ang-khi, improper shape and incorrect pattern are unacceptable defects in weaving. These defects showed the fact that the 'artist' weavers were not self-disciplined enough and therefore cannot make objects of good quality.

Ang-khi and her younger sister frequently showed up at the TREH. Apart from the fact that they were invited to demonstrate weaving, they also attended the training classes for weaving. Indeed, both of them had excellent skills and abundant experience in weaving. However, they still attended the training classes, which were meant to be an occasion where weavers could teach each other something new and exchange their skills. Although the classes were held for senior weavers, with the consent of the director of the TREH, I also attended most of the training classes. In one of the classes, a weaver taught us how to weave the 'pineapple pattern'. It was not a brand new pattern but had been designed by the previous generation; however Ang-khi was not familiar with it. So she concentrated on learning how to make it. After the class was dismissed and everybody else had left, only Ang-khi and her

younger sister were still practicing how to weave the pineapple pattern. I asked them why they were still weaving. They said to me that they were waiting for the bus to go home, but according to the timetable the bus would not come until later. They did not have to continue weaving, of course, and could have rested while they were waiting. I approached them and watched them weave. They, while continuing to weave, talked to me, as their weaving ‘classmate’: ‘It is not good to learn this.’ She told me, this was because the earnings of a weaver are meagre. I saw Ang-khi wipe away her tears, but it was not, as I found out later, tears caused by sorrow: ‘This morning my eyes kept producing tears. This pineapple pattern is not easy to learn, and I cannot make it properly.’

Despite all the situations they described, they did not stop practicing the new pattern and did not stop weaving, both of which made them suffer. Ang-khi had tears in her eyes owing to the fact that she, being aged, had poor eyesight and it got worse as her eyes became very tired after the class. Usually it was unnecessary for Ang-khi to look at the object that she was making, as she was all too familiar with every detail of weaving. She depended more on the touch of her fingers than her vision.²⁴ But today it was different. She had to stare at the strands of rush and the fine grains of the pattern in order to figure out the way of making the pattern and to make sure that she did it correctly. In so doing her eyes ended up sore and tired. But, she was the last one to leave the class to go home.

Learning the pineapple pattern is a good example of Ang-khi’s willingness to learn new things and makes changes to her practice, where necessary. Moreover, she studied with extreme diligence, applying herself no less than anyone else. Hence, when Ang-khi expressed her dislike or a disapproving view of the ‘innovative’ objects made by the ‘artist’ weavers, it is not the case, I suggest, that Ang-khi did not realise that fashions were changing, nor that she was resisting change. Rather, from Ang-khi’s point of view, the most crucial thing in practicing rush-weaving lies in the standards of, and the manner of, weaving that she learned from the very beginning of her life as a weaver.

²⁴ I described these in detail in Chapter Two.

I argue that Li Go'at-in and Tan Ang-khi have shown what it means to be a 'traditional' weaver. For the traditional weaver, there is a standard way of practicing rush-weaving, that is, a wooden model should be used in weaving and the pattern or form should be made correctly. Moreover, there is a manner of production which a weaver ought to have, that is, she must be patient and, most important of all, should be able to stand the suffering caused by weaving. The suffering includes sitting on the ground and weaving for as long as she can, sore eyes and waist, aching legs and fingers, and so forth (see Chapter Two).

The traditional weavers seldom or never used the term 'tradition' to refer to the standard or manner that they held to. What they believed in are the things that they learned and inherited from the past. However, it matters not because it came from the past, but because of the values embedded in it, i.e. the standard and manner are obtained through suffering. Hence, the traditional weaver's belief, though it consists of things from the past, does not imply that there is an unchanging past. Nor does it imply that the traditional is unwilling or unable to change. Changes, for the traditional weaver, always exist throughout her career in weaving. But to change is not the most important thing. To change refers to the variations in weaving, which can always be flexible, according to necessity in the industry. Nevertheless, what cannot be flexible and should not be changed is exactly the most important thing in her mind, that is, the standard and manner of weaving.

Tradition versus innovation

My analyses of the contested relationship between tradition and innovation in rush-weaving largely coincides with what Ingold and Hallam argue, that the continuity of tradition is due not to its passive inertia but to its active regeneration, which is in the tasks of carrying on (Ingold and Hallam 2007: 6). I do not attempt to argue whether the contemporary practice of rush-weaving is a change (discontinuity) or continuity with the past, as it is both. Nicholas Thomas has suggested that,

while some Pacific scholars and some of the contributors to the influential collection edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger often equated invention with

inauthenticity, it is now emphasized that created identities are not somehow contrived and insincere, that culture is instead inevitably 'tailored and embellished in the process of transmission,' and that that process is 'dynamic, creative- and real' (Thomas 1992: 213).

Also, Tim Ingold asserts that, there is no opposition between continuity and change; instead, change is what we observe when we look back, comparing a present state of affairs with those of select points in the past (2000: 147). Hence, my focus is to see what it means when some locals wanted to innovate and others did not think it relevant, and to see what each mindset involved respectively. People who wanted to innovate thought that rush-weaving was dying or almost dead, which was why it had become heritage and a museum object. To innovate was to revive. The traditional weaver thought rush-weaving would stay alive as long as the weaver suffered in weaving. Therefore, whether or not rush-weaving was heritage and something in the museum was not important to her. To keep weaving and suffering was more important. But, while arguing this, it does not mean that the traditional weaver represents an unchanging past. It is because she keeps changing that she is still weaving in the present.

The traditional weaver's belief, i.e. the standard and manner obtained through suffering, I argue, is a commitment to the past. However, it is not the opposite of 'innovation'. What the traditional weaver disagrees with is not innovation, but the fact that the 'artist' weaver treats weaving in a careless way, in which she cannot stand suffering in order to achieve products of better quality. I argue that Lu Gim-ha has shown the 'artist' weaver's commitment to the present. For her, the variation, fashion, design, and creativity are the most important things in practicing weaving. However, for the artist weaver, while innovation is a commitment to the present, innovation does not equal modernity. Indeed, there is tension between innovation and modernity. Although the artist weaver emphasises innovation, her rush-woven works are, after all, craft objects, rather than the mass-produced commodities of capitalist industrialisation.

In summary, the 'traditional' weaver's commitment to the past emphasises her suffering in the process of weaving and the patience of weaving fine and delicate

objects properly. Conversely, the ‘artist’ weaver stresses the variations in the practice of weaving, suffering in the thinking process, and in the patience required to think up new pieces.

What is embedded in the opposition between tradition and innovation is the different ways of treating the past and the question about what is to continue. The innovator and the revivalist consider the past as something to inherit and, more importantly, to be transformed. In so doing, what they want to continue is the practice of rush-weaving and the rush-weaving industry. From a very different perspective, the ‘traditional’ weaver, I argue, regards the past as something to inherit and it is thereby embedded in the practice of weaving. Hence, it is most significant to carry on the manner and standards of weaving inherited from the past.

The contradiction embedded in rush-weaving as heritage

If heritage is the celebration of the past, the ‘tradition’ of rush-weaving that the weaver inherits from the past is the subject to be celebrated. However, this ‘tradition’ is, in terms of craft production, thought to be the obstacle to progress and the reason for the previous decline of the industry, in which case continuity becomes problematic. If the ‘traditional’ weaver is requested to innovate by the official and the revivalist in the context of rush-weaving as craft production, it is a denial of rush-weaving as heritage. Essentially, innovation is necessary in the context of rush-weaving as craft production, whereas ‘tradition’ is crucial in the context of rush-weaving as heritage. In the end, rush-weaving becomes the ‘dissonant heritage’, a location for ‘confronting the past’ and a ‘heritage of conflict’ (Basu 2008).

Another contradiction embedded in rush-weaving as heritage is the tension between the past and the present. The past is always part of the present (in the form of people’s memories and constant references to the past in the present), rather than a subject to celebrate so as to infuse it with present purposes. It can be very easy for the state to set up policies to celebrate the past by making it heritage. However, for people whose life experience is deeply entwined with that heritage, the situation is very different. While heritage is, by definition, to celebrate the past so as to infuse it

with present purposes, people's feelings in relation to the past are far more complicated and the past is more than a subject of celebration. The past is not a remote object, but involves people's experiences and relations with family and friends. Because of these feelings, experiences and connections, the past is always part of the present. Even though Yuanli people hold a positive attitude towards the rush-weaving past, their meanings are very different from the connotations of the heritage status bestowed by the state.

Conclusion

Rush-weaving has been transformed into heritage over the last two decades. Even though the heritage movement was initially inaugurated by two completely opposite political intentions, it worked in a continuous way to push rush-weaving toward the direction of becoming heritage. While the government employs the notion of heritage in order to achieve its political goals, for people whose lives, experiences and memories are intimately connected to 'heritage', the meanings and impact of becoming heritage are extremely complicated and certainly different from the government's intention. Yuanli people have different opinions on the transformation of rush-weaving into heritage. They also have contradictory emotions towards the connection between the past and present of the rush-weaving industry, which is intertwined with the recent transformation of rush-weaving into heritage. In consequence, layers of the past of rush-weaving are revealed and rush-weaving as heritage is unsettled.

After becoming heritage, in rush-weaving production 'tradition versus innovation' becomes an issue. The 'traditional' weaver practices weaving in the manner that she inherited from the previous generation and believes this is the correct way. For the traditional weaver, there is a standard way of practicing rush-weaving and a manner of production which a weaver ought to have, which are most significant in the practice of weaving. This is a commitment to the past. In contrast, for the 'artist' weaver, variation, fashion, design and creativity are crucial in the practice of weaving. This is a commitment to the present.

I argue that contradictions are embedded in the process of rush-weaving becoming heritage. The first contradiction exists between rush-weaving as heritage and as craft production, which relates to what 'tradition' means. In the context of heritage, the 'tradition' of rush-weaving that the weaver inherits from the past is the subject to be celebrated. People look backward and inherit the value embedded in 'tradition'. However, in the context of craft production, this same 'tradition' is thought to be the obstacle to progress and the reason for the previous decline of the industry. People look forward and 'tradition' is to be transformed. The conflicts come from the fact that rush-weaving contains both heritage and craft production. The second contradiction lies in the fact that, in becoming heritage, the past of rush-weaving cannot simply be celebrated. This is because the past and the present can never be a completely separate period of time, but are always connected with each other. These contradictions are very important in understanding how the notion of heritage and the heritage movement are perceived and enacted in Yuanli society, individual daily life, and the weaver's practice of weaving.

Chapter Four

Illiterate masters: weavers and the museum

Since rush-weaving is a lifelong occupation for most of the current Yuanli weavers, they have experienced the various transformations which have developed in the industry. Each transformation has had the potential to reorganise the relationship between the different sections of the rush-weaving industry, as well as change the relationship between the weaver and her practice of weaving. The most recent transformation has been the establishment of a museum of rush-weaving, called the Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall (hereafter TREH), which has the potential to possibly change the relationship between the weaver and her practice of weaving, in that weaving may simply become a performance rather than work to which the weaver has devoted all her efforts. However, I found that this has not occurred in Yuanli. In this chapter, I aim to show that, even though the TREH has brought in new ways of learning rush-weaving skills and knowledge, it has not changed the relationship between the weaver and her practice of weaving, which at its core is the interrelationship between a weaver, the material for weaving, and their environment (as argued in Chapter Two).

In this chapter, I focus on the discussions on knowledge. Recent anthropological researches have borne fruitful discussions on knowing and learning, in relation to craft practices and embodied skills (e.g. Marchand 2010a, 2010b; Portisch 2010; Venkatesan 2010). Researchers who study different kinds of everyday knowledge and practices agree with each other about the emphasis on the processes and durational qualities of knowledge formation, as well as on the thinking about knowledge as a constructive and dialogical engagement between people, and between people, things, and environment. These researches have demonstrated that our human knowledge is constantly reconfigured in the activities and negotiations of everyday work and life (Marchand 2010c: Siv).

In terms of the Yuanli situation, I suggest that its special characteristics relate to

knowledge inside and outside the museum, as well as the different ways of transmitting knowledge before and after the emergence of the museum. In terms of the former, the division into weavers and non-weavers is not created but is reinforced by the establishment of the TREH. My analyses of this division attempts to focus on the relative value of knowledge of different kinds in different social contexts. In terms of the different ways in which knowledge is transmitted, I believe that it is an issue among weavers since the appearance of the TREH. Since the TREH not only preserves but also produces knowledge, the work of the TREH has led to different ways of transmission of knowledge pre and post establishment. The TREH creates a new way, which coexists with the old way, and the weaver needs to evaluate her way or strategy of sharing or not sharing her knowledge with other weavers.

A weaver's life with or without a museum

It was a drizzly morning when Siok-hun and I were walking in the empty funfair before she started her day's work selling rush-woven objects at a stall. The subject of the funfair had nothing to do with rush-weaving. As it was the day of inauguration for the newly refurbished 'Magic World' section of the funfair, organisations in the neighbourhood were asked to produce exhibitions or sell products in order to liven it up. Siok-hun was sent by the Shanjiao Community Development Association, where she worked as a weaver in the rush-weaving workroom. Siok-hun was recruited into the rush-weaving industry only recently, in 2004 in fact, largely due to the Shanjiao Community Development Association and the TREH. But, like many women of her generation, she was not a newcomer to the practice of weaving. She had been a weaver when she was little.

It was before the opening of the funfair and therefore the whole area was very quiet, which was probably why Siok-hun started to share some of her private thoughts. We took a walk for about thirty minutes, and near the end of our walk Siok-hun said to me, 'I am illiterate, and I am not experienced and knowledgeable at all. There is little that I can offer my children. Besides, I have only lived my life in this neighbourhood of Shanjiao and Jioushe – I've never been out of the area, to the wider world.' At the

time, we had only known each other for two months, and due to limited opportunities for conversation, we were not particularly close. When I was an apprentice weaver in the workroom, though, I frequently sat next to her, appreciated her skills and learned from her – this was possibly how she got to know me little by little. However, when I heard Siok-hun's words, it was still something of a shock and I was completely unprepared. She continued to talk about how much she wanted to, but was incapable of, helping her daughter, who was at secondary school, in terms of her study and future career. I wracked my mind for the appropriate words to respond, but found none. More importantly, my loss for words was due to the fact that what Siok-hun said about her inability to help her daughter was altogether too probable and undeniable. In the end, I could only say, 'now your daughter is studying and maybe you cannot help, but when she is working there must be many things that you can help her to learn', which I sincerely believed.

Because of the conversation with Siok-hun, that morning has stuck in my mind for its intensity of feeling and sorrowfulness. Nevertheless, as the feelings of sadness receded, I tried to think of whether I might be able to help Siok-hun and her daughter in some way. The situation appeared very differently, however, after another conversation with Siu-sim. Our first real conversation occurred in the early stages of my fieldwork, whereas our second sustained encounter took place in the final phase. It was an afternoon in early autumn and I had visited Siu-sim in her house. She was sitting on the living room floor and weaving a handbag, which had a pattern of a large camellia on it. I sat down in front of Siu-sim. We talked and she kept making the object. After a while, Siu-sim lifted up her head and said to me, 'I am an illiterate, just like a blind cow – an insignificant person. I never attended school. When I was little, I was afraid of going to school. I feared I would be beaten if I failed to understand. It was my own decision to not attend school.' By contrast, her brother, who is the only boy among the six children in the family, studied for six years. Later on, I asked Siu-sim whether she participated in any weaving competitions, as I knew that she was really good at making products with traditional patterns (such as the camellia, and the pattern featuring a pair of mandarin ducks) and these objects were sold in the TREH. She replied, 'I dare not. I do not know which kind of object I

should make.'

In contrast to the dark living room in which Siu-sim and I talked, the sunlight which was but a few steps away outside was dazzling. The contrast served only to intensify the sense of sadness, and we sat and talked for over an hour and a half. When the time came to leave, I stood up and Siu-sim raised her head to look at me and said, 'Come again after you return from abroad.' Seeing the dazzling smile on her face, I felt as if I was talking to a young girl, so honest and self-effacing.

After the conversation between Siu-sim and I, I was haunted by the absolute weight of the emotion arising from Siu-sim's analogy between herself and a blind cow. I felt I really needed some fresh air to calm down and think over what I had experienced. I rode the motorcycle to a temple nearby, sat down on the wall of the front courtyard and viewed the extensive green paddy fields in front of me, and took out my notebook to put into words some of the emotional turmoil I was experiencing. I was alone there, which was perfect a perfect opportunity to think through the experience. Above all, the conversation caused me to hesitate over some of my assumptions, and I started to wonder whether my high estimation of the value of rush-weaving was merely wishful thinking, whether the establishment of the TREH was in fact in recognition of its value, and whether the TREH would really make changes to the rush-weaving industry. If I had fundamentally misunderstood the situation, then, over the year of my fieldwork, my inability to perceive the reality of the situation would have affected every encounter with every weaver I met. When I told them how much I appreciated their rush-woven objects, was I in fact trying to persuade them, a group of people whose living conditions were so obviously far from perfect, or was I indeed trying to persuade myself?

Siok-hun and Siu-sim's stories seem suggest that, for them, the economic and social situation of the weaver had not been changed by the establishment and operation of the TREH. I had assumed that the TREH would change conditions for the rush-weaving industry, and thereby the weaver, but what is the reality of the situation?

The birth of a museum



The Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall in Yuanli Township

The museum as a social artefact

The formation of a museum like the TREH, i.e. a museum of local culture, is a process whereby multiple types of development converge. I agree with Jeanne Cannizzo's idea that the museum is a social artefact, although my discussion of the TREH is not in the context of cross-cultural encounter. She suggests that,

By studying the museum as an artifact, reading collections as cultural texts, and discovering the life histories of objects, it has become possible to understand something of the complexities of cross-cultural encounters. In the same process, the intricacies of different cultural configurations are revealed in objects through which various African peoples have expressed not only their individual artistry but also their deepest communal concerns. Finally, by placing in context the relationships, however brief, problematic, and painful, that developed as Canadian soldiers and missionaries travelled into the heart of Africa, it has become clear that the past is part of the present. (Cannizzo 1989: 92)

Hence, the purpose of the anthropological study of museums is, in Cannizzo's words, 'to analyze the museum itself as an artifact existing in a particular social milieu and historical period' (1991: 151).

I look into the way in which the TREH emerges from a particular social and historical context, and find that the TREH is indeed situated at the intersection of three interrelated but independent contexts in Taiwanese society. The first is the

context of the development of museums. While the first museum appeared in 1908, the notion of 'ecomuseum' introduced in the 1980s has had significant influence nationwide. Consequently, a new museum movement and a museum boom took place, where the number of museums increased dramatically from 90 in the 1980s to 400 in the 1990s (Jhang 2007). Moreover, most of the newly established museums were local museums in terms of the scale (i.e. in contrast to the national museum) and the themes (i.e. on local culture and specialities, in contrast to art or science museums). This is very different to the earlier situation where the national museums were always at the core of the development of museums between the 1950s and 1980s. I suggest that in this context, a museum like the TREH represents the transformation of people's perspective, from admiring and respecting cultures which have long been regarded as having 'higher' value, to turning back to look at the culture of the ordinary people. In so doing, the value of local culture and of ordinary people is rediscovered and emphasised.

The second context is the development of democratisation and the *bentuhua* (indigenisation) movement (see Chapter Three) in the 1980s. The respective development of the two reinforced each other and, in turn, led to the transformation of cultural ideology in society. Instead of Chinese culture being regarded as the only orthodoxy, people started to look for or rediscover their own culture, often very different from Chinese culture, and at one time oppressed. In Yuanli, for instance, an active participant and the leader of a community association once told me that in recent years he was often concerned with, and kept thinking about, questions such as 'what do we have in Yuanli?' and 'what do we have in Taiwan?'. In other words, people strove to understand the characteristics of their own culture.

Thirdly, there is the development of domestic tourism over the past few decades. The prevalence of domestic tourism made local distinctiveness and uniqueness of central importance. A place such as Yuanli needs to find its own unique characteristics in order to be distinct from, and compete with, other places and so become a popular tourist destination. Each place either looks back on earlier life to search for interesting elements or creates new characteristics for the tourist industry. I suggest

that it is these three contexts that engender the appearance of the TREH in contemporary society.

A museum originated from and dedicated to identity

In addition to the broad social and historical context, there are more direct factors that have led to the formation of the TREH. It was primarily a government policy entitled 'Programme of the Museum of Local Culture' that gave rise to the establishment of the TREH. On the eighteenth of March 2000, for the first time in Taiwan's history, an opposition party (the DPP) won the presidential election. The DPP fundamentally considers Taiwanese identity as an ethnic, cultural, and national identity, very different from Chinese identity, and values Taiwanese culture and history, which had been oppressed over the past fifty years, and its rediscovery. Between 2000 and 2008, when the DPP was in power, the formation of Taiwanese identity and nationalism went hand in hand with the policies of the central government.¹ A series of cultural and economic policies, underneath which was a strong sense of Taiwanese identity or 'Taiwanese cultural nationalism' (Hsiao 1999), led the direction of social and cultural development.

The intention of the DPP government to forge Taiwanese identity is manifested in its most significant policy entitled 'Challenge 2008: National Development Programme' (hereafter 'Challenge 2008'). The DPP government set up the programme in 2002, as it is stated in the official document, to serve as a source of strategy for the new century in order to face the challenges of global competition, the impact of the rapid rise of Chinese economic power, and the urgent need for a revolution in Taiwanese societal politics, finance, and banking. In so doing, the government prepared for the impact which Taiwan's entry to the World Trade Organisation would have, particularly serious in rural towns such as Yuanli. The leisure industry could serve as an alternative to agriculture. Nevertheless, the connotation of this national

¹ In terms of the government structure, the Taiwanese government is divided into central and county/city levels. The central government consists of the Office of the President, the National Assembly, and five branches (the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, the Judicial Branch, the Examination Branch, and the Control Branch). In addition, the township office is under the control of the county government.

programme is the forging of Taiwanese identity.

Between 2002 and 2008, over 250 Museums of Local Culture (*Difang wunhua guan*) were established. The central government had at least two purposes in the 'Programme of the Museum of Local Culture', which was a sub-programme of 'Challenge 2008'. In the literal sense of its title, the sub-programme was to establish a Museum of Local Culture in every town throughout the country. Museums of this kind were expected to contribute to the development of domestic tourism on the one hand, and on the other hand were also a continuation of the previous policy of 'community building' first raised by the Council for Cultural Affairs (hereafter CCA) in 1994.² Firstly, the government encouraged the development of the tourist industry and believed that the formation of local specialisms and characteristics would intensify the content and depth of domestic tourism. Through the transformation of local culture into a resource for tourism, the government hoped that the tourist industry in local society would develop and, in turn, would improve employment and bring economic benefits to local society. Secondly, drawing on the idea of 'community building', the government allowed Museums of Local Culture to become cultural centres where local specialists in history, literature, and art would gather and bring their talent and creativity into play. Meanwhile, such museums would become the point of access through which outsiders could approach local history and culture. In the process of developing these museums, the state supposed, the control of planning, operation and administration would belong to local society, and thereby a sense of agency and community would emerge. Locality, community, local specialisms and creativity altogether would make a Museum of Local Culture become the cornerstone for the sustainable development of local society. Thus, such museums could revitalise local industries and create homes for local cultures and ways of life, for residents.

Additionally, the 'Programme of the Museum of Local Culture' also includes the aims of two other CCA programmes: 'preservation and renovation of historic buildings' and 'renovation of unused space'. The former emphasises the conservation

² Aside from these two, the government also wants to use this programme to balance the developing differences between urban and rural.

of cultural properties, including cultural relics, monuments, historic buildings and artefacts, which are significant elements of Taiwanese history and culture. Through the latter, the central government encourages organisations, including local governments and non-governmental agencies, to invest resources in existing but unused (public) space. With the refurbishment of such buildings and the installation of exhibitions, the museum could serve as a locally operated space and a platform where the government and local society could cooperate and communicate.

In 2004, the TREH was established in the name of the Museum of Local Culture, which meant that rush-weaving was regarded by the founders as the local culture of Yuanli. By examining its collections, I found that the TREH came from the combination of two earlier displays made in 1996 – one of rush-woven objects and the other of articles related to rural life. In 1996, the new building of the Yuanli Farmers' Association was inaugurated. The executive secretary wanted to have a space where guests of the Farmers' Association could be guided around when they visited Yuanli. Meanwhile, Yuanli people, including the staff of the Farmer's Association, saw the loss of much creativity and skill in weaving as the older weavers died with the passage of time. Thus, they felt the necessity to arrange a display hall of rush-woven objects. This was one of the two displays. In the other display, by setting up a display hall of objects from rural life, the staff emphasised the process of transformation of agriculture and farming life. They showed how the farmers had striven rigorously in order to cultivate the land in the early days, in contrast to contemporary farming life which had been made easy by modernisation. They also showed that, in contrast to the early days when farmers worked only with simple tools and through hard manual labour, in contemporary times the mechanisation of farming had made work relatively easy. Hence, through the two displays, the Farmers' Association wanted to pass down rural culture and rush-weaving culture to the next generation.

Comparing the TREH and the earlier displays, both were established due to government policy and subsidies. While the earlier displays had come about due to policy formulated by the Council of Agriculture, entitled 'A cultural classroom for

farmers', and which aimed to educate farmers, the TREH was subsidised by the CCA and expected to eventually become a local cultural centre in the everyday life of Yuanli people, from which a sense of community and solidarity would emerge. In the exhibition commentary was written, 'TREH is established in memory of the cultural influence of the rush-weaving industry in this area.' From my observations, what the museum does has gone beyond this statement. I suggest that the difference between the TREH and the earlier displays is that, while the intention to preserve cultural objects for posterity remains, the aims have extended to include the continuance of the practice of rush-weaving. Additionally, the venue for the earlier displays only opened when guests of the Yuanli Farmers' Association visited. Thus, neither the staff nor a shop was available in the venue. TREH, however, is always greeting visitors during its opening hours, and there are regular staff and even a museum shop.

The TREH is situated in a former granary, which was built in the 1960s. After a new and more efficient granary was built with improved technology, the granary was left unused. Thus, it fitted in with the government's goal of renovation of historic buildings and unused space. The Yuanli Farmers' Association asked a local architect to refurbish the building and a university lecturer, who was a photographer by profession, to make the exhibitions. The museum is owned and operated by the Yuanli Farmers' Association.

Although the TREH was expected to help forge local identity, based on the fact that Yuanli people share rush-weaving culture collectively, it in fact became the site, if not the cause, of an increased number of disputes and differences. Those weavers who went to the TREH frequently, often made rush-woven objects together or chatted with each other in the museum. When the weavers, ranging from two to twenty, spent time together, they just kept telling jokes or made fun of each other. Nothing serious was discussed there. I suggest there are at least two reasons for this situation. Yuanli people, especially weavers, usually compete with each other for the resources or profits from the TREH, by receiving orders for rush-woven objects or taking part in performances and classes for visitors. The profits from weaving and weaving-related activities were not always equally shared, though the director of the

TREH always tried to distribute profits equally according to effort. Conflicts between weavers arose, and one weaver even lost her connection with the TREH.

Another source of conflict relates to differences in ideology and identity. Yuanli people and weavers may come into dispute when discussing 'sensitive' issues, which are associated with their different political, national, or cultural identities. By 'sensitive' issues, I refer to the fact that in contemporary Taiwanese society there is some conflict between two ideologically opposite positions - Taiwanese identity versus Chinese identity. Thus, Yuanli people often avoided discussions related to ideology in public, unless they were sure that the people concerned shared the same identity. However, disputes or even serious fights sometimes still happened. Such disputes, consequently, tended to pull apart social relationships, though unintentionally. These complexities have further contributed to the 'contested terrain' which the TREH occupies (Karp 1991).

In fact, the TREH has become an arena in which each of the various sides or factions competes to achieve its own goals. Primarily there were at least three different identifiable positions which coexisted in varying degrees of contention with one another – the central government³, the local organisation (i.e. the Yuanli Farmers' Association) and Yuanli people. While the establishment of the TREH was largely a result of the policies of the central government, it was actually the Yuanli Farmers' Association that managed the operation of the TREH and this local organisation did not necessarily follow everything that the government expected. After the TREH opened to the public, the Farmers' Association ran the museum in its own way, considering what was possible and needed in the local society. Reviewing the conversation between the director of the NTCRI and Tan Hui-hun, which was fully recorded in Chapter Three, the difference is clear. Although the director of the NTCRI, who represented the government's concerns, criticised the TREH for working with elderly weavers rather than the younger generation, the TREH did not alter its behaviour as it was the only way that the museum could or should have

³ By the central government, I refer to the branches and their subordinate ministries, councils, and institutes. For instance, the CCA is under the command of the Executive Branch, and the NTCRI is under the command of the CCA. They are all part of the central government.

operated at that time. While the Yuanli Farmers' Association, being the most important organisation in Yuanli⁴, devoted itself to the operation of the TREH and the rush-weaving industry, not every resident appreciated or agreed with what it did. I will describe this in detail later.

In addition to the above three interests, there are concerns represented by other local organisations and individuals, such as the Yuanli Rotary Club and the TREH exhibition maker. For instance, the Yuanli Rotary Club sponsored and cooperated to hold an event with the Yuanli Farmers' Association in order to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Rotary. The person in charge of the exhibition said to me that he could hardly find anything when he was preparing the materials for exhibitions for the TREH. So he decided to take photographs and create historical documents for the future generations of Yuanli people.

⁴ According to Article 1 of the Farmers Association Act: 'A farmers association shall operate for such purposes as safeguarding farmers' rights and interests, enhancing farmers' knowledge and skills, boosting the modernization of agriculture, increasing crop yields, improving farmers' livelihood and developing rural economy' (27 May 2009 amended). The Yuanli Farmers' Association is by its nature somewhere between a government body and a private company. On the one hand, it is in a way equivalent to the Yuanli Township Office from the perspective of Yuanli people, because it is responsible for delivering the government's policies and becomes the agent of the government in local society. On the other hand, it functions in different ways to the Yuanli Township office. The Yuanli Farmers' Association has a savings and loan division, an insurance division, a supply and marketing division, a promotion division, and a warehouse. Thus it is closely associated with the everyday life of Yuanli people.

The contribution of a museum to the revival of the rush-weaving industry



The museum shop

In addition to forging an identity, the TREH has the other aim of revitalising local economy through bridging the rush-weaving industry and the tourist industry. Yuanli is a rural town, where half of the population are rice farmers. Rush-weaving used to be the best cash enterprise before its decline over the last three decades. Rush-weaving and rice are the primary local industries of Yuanli. In the age of tourism, local strengths have become indispensable to the formation of a tourist destination. The Yuanli Farmers' Association aimed to develop the particular characteristics of Yuanli, that is, as a fertile town which serves as the granary of the whole county and as a locality for rush-weaving culture. The Farmers' Association expected that the TREH exhibitions would help to promote the local rice farming and rush-weaving industries, and make Yuanli a tourist destination.

In order to make Yuanli appealing to tourists and to distinguish it from other destinations, the emphasis on the uniqueness of Yuanli in terms of its role in the rush-weaving industry has been intensified. As I have addressed (see Introduction), in this context the relationship between Yuanli and Dajia has been transformed from one of cooperation in the past to competition in the present. That is how the controversy of 'Yuanli or Dajia to be the original and representative place of rush-weaving' became

extremely significant to Yuanli people. I suggest that this controversy existed before the establishment of the TREH and even before the prevalence of domestic tourism. It mattered previously, though probably for other reasons, such as an imbalance in the long-term relationship between the weaver and the merchant, which I will address later. The discourse has intensified, however, because of the establishment of the TREH and its focus on connecting with the tourist industry, making such a distinction more urgent and necessary, but also because the museum is a powerful instrument in the production of discourses aimed at tourists. An example of this is:

Yuanli is the original place of rush-weaving and the location of production of rush-woven objects. Rush-woven products are all made here in Yuanli, while Dajia is merely the market for rush-woven products. But Dajia always tries to steal our reputation.

This discourse was reiterated in the guided tour given by the staff of the TREH and in the museum shop where visitors purchased products. Also, it became an important part of the narratives of Yuanli people. The distinction represents the boundary of sameness from difference on the one hand, and is crucial in the promotion of rush-woven commodities on the other.

Most of the museum exhibitions, especially those objects associated with rural life – including farming tools, utensils, and objects related to customs and folk life (e.g. wedding ceremony, special food in festivals) from the early days – were intended to engender feelings of nostalgia in tourists. In the museum pamphlet the term nostalgia was used in the title as well as in the contents. In exhibiting the feeling of nostalgia, the TREH seems to be like a heritage centre in the heritage industry (e.g. Hewison 1987; Lowenthal 1998). But what is different is that, while the heritage industry is most often based on the demise of a previous livelihood, rush-weaving is a declining but ongoing industry. Hence, through introducing rush-weaving culture to tourists, Yuanli people hoped that the merits of rush-woven objects would be appreciated and the industry would revive. In addition, the TREH not only provided old-fashioned products to appeal to a sense of nostalgia but also ‘modern’ goods related to contemporary life and use.

The TREH was set up in a different location from the building where the previous two displays were situated. The previous two displays were in the headquarters of the

Yuanli Farmers' Association, which was near to the Yuanli train station and in the town centre. The shop that sold rush-woven products, usually called the '*bo-chhioh-hang*' (hat-and-mat shop), was also situated in one of the main streets in the town centre. At the time of my fieldwork there were, in total, four hat-and-mat shops. The location of the four shops, being close to the train station and the main road in front of the station, was significant, because previously customers who visited Yuanli to purchase rush-woven products either came by train or drove from the main road. Nowadays, with the recent development of domestic tourism, most people travel by car or by coach, and they usually come via the motorway. The new motorway interchange has been in service since 2003 and it is close to the area where the TREH is located, but relatively far from the town centre. Therefore, the museum shop tends to host more tourists and customers than the shops in the street, and weavers are more likely to sell their objects to the museum shop. In addition, the variety of rush-woven products in the museum shop is much better than in the hat-and-mat shops. Hence, the TREH, as a newcomer to the rush-weaving industry, is ideally located to serve as a venue for sales in a new era.

It may be too early to assess whether or not the TREH has revitalised the rush-weaving industry. Nevertheless, a couple of changes occurred after the establishment of the TREH. More weavers got involved in the practice of weaving. Among those who joined after the TREH opened, some had been weavers before but had quit to take up other jobs, and then returned to the rush-weaving industry, while others, such as tailors or housewives for example, joined the industry for the first time in their fifties and sixties. In addition, more fields were used for growing rush, though not a dramatic increase. Both the increase of weavers and rush fields was caused by the fact that the operation of the TREH has created a renewed demand for rush-woven products.

The TREH operation – exhibitions, classes and events, and the network



The museum exhibition



Rush-woven objects exhibited in the museum

Since its establishment, the TREH has catered both to outsiders and insiders of Yuanli. Its operation covers various domains from the preservation and exhibition of objects, promotion and sale of rush-woven products, to the training and exchange of expertise in rush-weaving. At the time of establishment, the TREH exhibitions consisted of three themes – rush-weaving culture, rice culture, and folk life. After my fieldwork, in 2007, new articles of rush-weaving culture replaced the exhibition on rice culture, where three showcases were replaced with new exhibitions, one of them featuring the life stories of ten weavers, entitled ‘Taiwan Yuanli *a-ma de gushih*’

(The stories of grandmothers of Yuanli, Taiwan).⁵

Various types of media were employed in the exhibitions, including items, models, texts, photos, and live performances. The emphasis on and use of models was astonishing, showing vivid scenes from rush harvesting and weaving, to the processing of products. Seven sets of models in total were placed in three showcases, out of the ten in the whole museum. I was wondering why models were used, if photos and even live performances could illustrate things better. I suggest it is because the Farmers' Association intended to show, as much as possible, the skill and knowledge embedded in the processes of the production of rush-woven objects. Thus the exhibitions, I found, were keen to show the procedures from growing the rush in the field to packing the goods, that is, the transformation from a piece of rush to a completed rush-woven object. These models exactly embody what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes: 'they show the process by which ceramics and textiles were manufactured, step by step, or how they were used in daily life and ceremony' (1991: 398).

Live performances took place either when a group of people visited the TREH and had booked a guided tour in advance, or when an event was held. Tour groups, including school students, private companies and government organisations, frequently visited the TREH and indeed were the major visitors. Sometimes people would come to make videos for a television programme or take photographs for publications. The staff of the TREH would ask weavers who lived nearby to perform weaving for these visitors. The weavers' demonstrations consistently attracted many visitors and inspired a great deal of interest in the performances, which became the most interesting part of the whole guided tour. Often visitors would strike up conversations with the weavers, asking them questions about weaving or sharing similar experiences that they had had in the past.

Groups visiting for a guided tour would often book into the do-it-yourself (DIY) classes too. In these classes, weavers taught visitors to make simple rush-woven

⁵ I obtained this information through my communication with the TREH staff and the exhibition organiser in the process of writing up the thesis.

objects, which could be completed in thirty minutes. In so doing, visitors could experience personally the practice of weaving.

The museum shop sold more than seventy different kinds of rush-woven products. In fact, the number of objects far exceeded seventy, due to the orders which customers placed for bespoke items, according to need, preference in size, colour etc. The following seven types of product were routinely available in the TREH shop: bedding, e.g. single and double bed mats, cradle mats, pram mats, and pillow mats and cases; hats, e.g. female, male and children's hats; practical items, e.g. business card cases, slippers, shoe-pads, seat mats, various types of handbag and purses, mobile phone cases, briefcases, pencil-cases, tobacco cases, tea caddies, tissue cases, and fans; accessories, e.g. brooches, mobile phone accessories; ornamental, e.g. the 'male and female mandarin duck' mats, the 'dragon and phoenix' mats; costume, e.g. belts, ties and even bikinis; other items, e.g. a gift box of a set of objects including a tiny male rush-hat brooch, tiny rush-hat brooches, and business cases.

Apart from selling rush-woven products to visitors, the museum shop received orders from public and private organisations and individuals. The orders included items ranging from several to hundreds of products. After receiving orders, and considering how demanding each order was, the TREH would ask weavers with whom it had established a cooperative relationship, to make these products. In order to run the museum shop, the TREH also needed to cooperate not only with weavers but also shops, processors, and the Shanjiao community workroom. Sometimes the TREH bought goods from the community workroom or hat-and-mat shops, with whom it more often cooperated than competed.

In order to promote the TREH, rush, rush-weaving, and rush-woven objects, the Farmers' Association held events in the TREH once in a while, including competitions, exhibitions and a fashion show. On the day the TREH opened to the public, a rush-weaving competition was held. As a weaver described to me, unlike all the previous competitions where people wove at home and submitted articles, this time all competitors came to the venue and wove on the spot within a limited period

of time. For this reason, many competitors still remembered this event and talked about it. More importantly, many weavers established a relationship with the TREH because of this competition.

After the first anniversary, the Farmers' Association held a festival on a grand scale, where various events took place. Primarily, it was the 'one hundred weavers weaving', which was so memorable for many of the weavers. Before the event, weavers were invited by the staff of the Farmers' Association, or registered to attend voluntarily. Amazingly, on the day of the event, over one hundred weavers came and each person wove in front of the TREH for two to three hours. It was an impressive sight, and many of those who attended took great pleasure in the spectacle and have wonderful memories of it. In the same festival, another event featured a competition of rush-woven installation art. The TREH invited the competitors, who were groups of university students majoring in architecture or design. Participants were asked to make installation artwork by using triangle rush as the material, along with straw and bamboo. The work of the winning team was placed at the entrance of the TREH after the competition. Through this competition, the TREH aimed to introduce triangle rush to these students, hopefully encouraging them to use rush in their future artistic work. In addition, there was a fashion show featuring innovative product design, including items such as rush-woven bikinis and ties. In so doing, the TREH wanted to attract the attention of the public, especially young people, to create a profile for and encourage sales of rush-woven products.

While it was crucially important to build the reputation of the TREH and rush-weaving, the museum also needed to recruit weavers and offer them some input. Thus, the TREH organised training courses for weavers from time to time. In 2006, the TREH was subsidised by the NTCRI (see Chapter Three) and a series of training courses was arranged. There were twelve classes in total, and weavers with advanced skills were invited to teach each class. Most trainees were skilled weavers; however, a few young learners joined enthusiastically. In the end, the TREH organised an exhibition of rush-weaving, where the best work from the training classes was exhibited. Some of the items became part of the exhibition on 'The stories of

grandmothers of Yuanli, Taiwan’.

Date	Event		Venue	Aim of event
7 Jul 2004	Competition	Rush-weaving competition: traditional and innovative groups	The newly built official building of the Yuanli Farmers' Association next to the TREH	On-the-spot competition on the opening day of the TREH to promote the TREH and rush-weaving
Mar 2005		Transmission of weaving culture from generation to generation, in memory of Hong Yang	In front of the TREH	Joint event celebrating the contribution which Hong Yang, the founder of the rush-hat, made in serving the community all her life, her qualities as a role model for posterity; also to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Rotary
19 Apr 2005		TREH recognised as a 'Taiwan Craft Shop'	The TREH	To celebrate the TREH's status as an approved 'Taiwan Craft Shop', where, according to staff, products and the materials used to make them come entirely from Taiwan (i.e. are not imported).
2005	Competition and exhibition	Artistic rush-woven works	The TREH	Engaging with artisans and artists on the theme of rush-weaving in ceramics or lacquer ware, i.e. triangle rush motifs, rush flowers, rush-weaving, poems relating to rush, the use of rush ash as glaze. The best works became part of the collections and a permanent exhibit of the TREH
28 Oct – 1 Nov 2005		One hundred weavers weaving	In front of the TREH	To promote the TREH and rush-weaving
	Competition	Installation art competition with triangle rush, straw, etc.	An unused granary	To introduce rush to young people, to encourage them to consider rush a suitable material for artwork.
		A fashion show of rush-weaving	In front of the TREH	To attract the attention of the public, especially young people, to raise the profile and encourage purchase of rush-woven products
2 Sep 2006	DIY class and live performances of rush-weaving	Let's get married	In front of and inside the TREH	To promote the TREH as well as the 'colouring the rice paddy', which was the latest selling point, using the newly introduced technology to make patterns and characters on the paddy by growing different kinds of rice plants
11 Sep – 23 Oct 2006	Training courses	Advanced rush-weaving classes (12 classes)	The TREH	To let weavers learn from each other by teaching their own professional skills and techniques in the classes
25 Nov – 3 Dec 2006	Exhibition	An exhibition of skilled works by leading weavers	An unused granary	To exhibit the works made in the advanced rush-weaving classes, and to collect specific rush-woven objects in order to enhance the collections of the TREH

Table 5. Events held by the Yuanli Farmers' Association in relation to the TREH between 2004 and 2006

The representation of the past in the TREH

I have argued in Chapter One that the Dajia Hat embodies the mutual entanglement between Yuanli and Japanese people, and that the development of rush-weaving in the Japanese colonial period is a shared history. In the exhibitions held in the TREH, this entangled history was not denied. Rather, rush-weaving, chosen by the Japanese colonial authorities to be a local speciality, is presently embraced by Yuanli people as their 'own' culture. Moreover, the history related to the Japanese administration is celebrated in the exhibition. Certainly it may not necessarily represent people's voice, as it was initiated and presented by the Farmers' Association and the exhibition organiser. Weavers were relatively indifferent to the way in which this history was presented in the museum. The reason for this will be addressed later.

I suggest that the TREH is an ecomuseum and a heritage centre. While a museum aims to present the past through its collections, an ecomuseum is concerned with its place within the context of community and the environment (Davis 1999). An ecomuseum aims 'to provide a coherent overview of the customs, skills, struggles, subjective experiences and socio-cultural resources of a given population', and it 'should concern itself with the preservation of traditional skills rather than the museumification of objects', that is, 'its true charge is the collective memory, the source of a people's identity' (Poulot 1994: 73). This is very close to the situation of the TREH. In the TREH, what matters is neither the collections nor the object-centred curatorial activities. In fact, none of the 'professional' museum staff are involved in the operation of the TREH. Its collections include both historical and contemporary objects, which sometimes makes it more like a gallery of rush-weaving. But the most important role is its representation of the history of, and the contemporary practice in, the rush-weaving industry. Ecomuseums are above all 'about places – places that are very special to the people who live there' (Davis 1999: xiv). This is the very point that I think relates to the TREH.

The TREH is about the place where people live their lives and earn a living. Rush-weaving is not a handcraft that is available everywhere, but is deeply embedded in

the local environment. Not only should the rush grown in the fields have certain qualities, but it is also because of this local material that people developed ways of making it into useful objects. Even though nowadays people can easily transport the rush from one place to another and therefore people living in other places can also make objects using the same kind of rush, Yuanli people still believe that distinguishable differences exist between their locally-made objects and others. In addition, in the long-term development of the rush-weaving industry, people's life stories, local history, and the history of the industry have all interwoven with each other. Hence, a museum of rush-weaving is literally a museum of Yuanli – of its people, history, and culture.

The TREH is a heritage centre, I suggest, in the sense that it exhibits local culture and ordinary life. It is similar to the kind of industrial and open-air museums that Peter Davis describes in his analysis of ecomuseums. In contrast to traditional museums, as Davis suggests, the industrial and open-air museums attempt to 'place more emphasis on the ordinary – commonplace buildings and the material evidence of the lives of ordinary people – and our more recent past' (1999: 13). I argue that, the TREH acts as a heritage centre which is, as MacDonald suggests, 'a useful site in which to explore questions about local identity and the performance of culture for tourism' (1997a: 155). It has connected the past (i.e. the legacy from the past as tradition and sources of identity) and the future (i.e. the performance of culture for tourism).

The museum and rush-weaving

From my participant observation of the day-to-day operation in the TREH, I found that it is essentially a museum concerned both with the rush-weaving industry and the heritage of rush-weaving. TREH's entry into the rush-weaving industry has been addressed in an earlier section of this chapter, and so I will move on to the second half of the story in relation to the heritage of rush-weaving.

The TREH hosting the intangible and tangible heritage of rush-weaving

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.⁶

This is the International Council of Museum's definition of a museum. I doubt if anyone ever considered the ICOM's definition in setting up the TREH, but the TREH indeed functions as an institution exhibiting the tangible and intangible heritage of rush-weaving. The various kinds of rush-woven objects and articles relating to rush-weaving are the tangible heritage, whereas the weaver's skill and knowledge that are embedded in the objects are the intangible heritage.

The kinds of rush-woven objects which were displayed in the exhibitions held at the TREH, included: classic patterns and products that were popular previously, newly made and innovative articles, and artistic works. Each kind of object functioned in different ways, and sometimes the result was beyond the expectations of either the staff or the exhibition organiser. For instance, exhibiting classic patterns and products was meant to let people appreciate the delicacy and ingenuity found in master weaver's works of the past. While some weavers saw these earlier samples as excellent reference for current production, others treated them in an opposite way. As one weaver said to me when I asked her to name and explain the techniques of the various patterns, using items from the TREH exhibitions as examples: 'These are all patterns from the old times, but I prefer not to follow and make objects in these old styles' – she referred to a section of the exhibition. Another example is that, while the TREH is separated into exhibitions and the museum shop, which are supposed to function in different ways, sometimes exhibitions became the extension of the display in the museum shop. Once when I was helping in the museum shop, a customer came and asked the staff member next to me, 'I really like one object in the showcase. Is it available in this shop?' Like this case, objects exhibited in the showcase are appreciated and offer the potential for sales to visitors.

⁶ <http://icom.museum/definition.html>.

Since the establishment of the TREH, rush-woven objects have been transformed from being simply a commodity to being an object which has various possibilities. In other words, when a weaver is going to make a new rush-woven object, it could possibly end up as part of a museum collection, it could be an artistic work, a heritage product, a competition item or exhibition item, or a commodity. By an artistic work, I refer to those articles made with the intention of being treated as artwork, like a painting. A heritage product is, in my opinion, the kind of object that can promote rush-weaving as ‘traditional craft’ or as ‘cultural property’.

However, it is in fact very difficult to distinguish these categories from each other. In addition, an object usually belongs to more than one category at the same time and frequently moves among these categories. For instance, I once observed the following situation in the TREH. A weaver made an object, *chhiu-kho*, and brought it to the TREH to show it to the staff. The staff appreciated her object as being nicely made, so she decided to give it to the TREH. The staff then put the *chhiu-kho* in the showcase, along with other objects that were there already. In this case, the weaver had actually learned how to make the *chhiu-kho* in a training class, which had been taught by a master weaver. Initially, the weaver merely practiced after the class and wanted to know whether the staff thought her object good or not. But in the end her object became an exhibition item and very possibly, I suppose, would be introduced as a heritage object in future guided tours. *Chhiu-kho*, literally arm trousers, is a pair of rush-woven sleeves which cover the forearms for protection. As the master weaver who taught *chhiu-kho* in the training class recalled, in the past farmers always wore *chhiu-kho* while harvesting rice. Unlike the ‘four frames mat’, the ‘dragon and phoenix mat’ and the ‘male and female mandarin ducks mat’, which are classic and extraordinary products, *chhiu-kho* had previously been used in everyday life but had since become rare in the present day. The master weaver missed this type of item, tried to remember how to make it, and taught it in the class. I think both kinds can be regarded as heritage objects. Interestingly, in terms of the *chhiu-kho* that was eventually put in the showcase, the format is old, but the object is newly made. Another example is that, a weaver made a rush-woven object, which she sent to a competition. Unfortunately, she did not get any prize in that competition, but in the

end her work was included in the new exhibition, 'The stories of grandmothers of Yuanli, Taiwan'. This has shown that, though the object was initially made as a piece for a competition, it eventually ended up as part of a museum collection.

Contradictions embedded in the transformation of rush-weaving becoming heritage, as addressed in Chapter Three, continued in the context of the museum. Firstly, the confrontation between tradition and innovation remains. Competitions were held frequently by the TREH as well as other organisations. I suggest this is because, for the people who held rush-weaving competitions, it is a good way to involve, simultaneously, the industry and heritage, as well as innovation and tradition, as innovation is beneficial to the industry and tradition is necessary to heritage. Thus, in most competitions there existed a division between the traditional group and the innovative group. However, one of the weavers, whose *chhiu-lo* was considered to be the best in Yuanli, never won any prize in the competitions that she attended. This weaver always stuck to the manner and standard of weaving that she had learned and inherited from the past. The fact that this weaver received no recognition in the competition is, I suggest, related to the view that rush-weaving should be considered as heritage. That is, tradition was not truly appreciated, whereas innovative products, drawing on the traditional elements, are more welcome.

The second contradiction that exists is the gap between being heritage, understood as processes with high symbolic value, versus being a commodity with low economic value, as was described in Chapter Three. Even though the museum had recognised the value of rush-woven products, prices did not go up and they were certainly not treated like artwork. Weaving remains a livelihood that is time-consuming but poorly paid. This issue is further related to the price gap, which will be explored later.

Changes and confrontations: skill-based knowledge and the characteristics of objects



Weavers giving a weaving demonstration for visitors at the museum



Weavers selecting rush before the training classes



Weavers in the training classes held by the museum



A weaver figuring out how to weave a pattern in the training class

The TREH preserves knowledge and objects, while also producing objects and knowledge. I suggest that the various domains of the TREH operation (e.g. exhibitions, classes, events) have shown how a museum deals with the skill-based knowledge of rush-weaving and the objects of this knowledge. Because the operation of the TREH involves the rush-weaving industry as well as the heritage of rush-weaving, the characteristics of skill-based knowledge and rush-woven objects have been transformed in each domain (i.e. industry and heritage), in response to the work of the museum. Concerning objects in the context of the museum, my focus is not to examine the life histories of objects or the shifting contexts and meanings of an object (c.f. Cannizzo 1989; Peers 1999; Sansi-Roca 2005). Rather, I look at the changing characteristics of the rush-woven object, taking the impact of the museum into consideration, and relate this transformation to the weaver's practice of weaving.

I argue that the appearance of the TREH has engendered a distinction between two ways of considering the knowledge of weaving and two ways of thinking about rush-woven objects. Before the establishment of the TREH, most weavers generally took the same attitude toward knowledge of rush-weaving. Rush-weaving was a weaver's way of living. Her expertise, that is, each weaver's specific pattern, form or product, which she made with the greatest of skill, would secure her position in the industry and ensure her earnings. Under the circumstances, a weaver definitely had to keep her particular knowledge and techniques a secret in order to earn more. Even though

sometimes the merchant would bring a sample, which was made by the best weaver, to another weaver and let her copy it while producing objects, the weaver had to figure out the correct way of making it on her own. In spite of the fact that weavers, who were good friends, might share information with each other, the knowledge and particular techniques of each individual weaver remained largely undisclosed.

However, the formation of the TREH meant that rush-woven objects were transformed from commodities to heritage, and further, to being the emblem of Yuanli, i.e. rush-weaving represents the local culture of Yuanli. In other words, the knowledge of rush-weaving has become the collective knowledge that belongs to all Yuanli people and future generations. While individual knowledge is not for sharing, collective knowledge is exchanged in cultural transmission and the continuity of the industry. The training class is a venue where weavers are supposed to share and exchange knowledge with each other. In addition, the exchange of knowledge is not only for cultural transmission, but is also about the shared benefit. For example, on one particular occasion the museum shop received an urgent order, which requested products immediately, but at the time the museum shop could only find one weaver who knew how to make the product in question. Therefore, the museum staff asked the weaver to teach other weavers and all of them completed the order together and shared the profits. This example has shown clearly that the museum produces the knowledge of rush-weaving in the way that it offers the opportunity for weavers to exchange expertise with each other, which seems to be beneficial to everyone involved.

The dilemma is evident. If every weaver keeps her special skills and knowledge a secret by not allowing other weavers to watch and learn her techniques, her skills and knowledge will possibly disappear in the end. But if she shares everything without concealment, she is risking her work security and stability of life. Even though at present the museum devotes itself to preserving the collective knowledge of rush-weaving, weavers still have to compete for benefits in the rush-weaving industry.

I argue that we can further distinguish between the two: different ways of

considering knowledge of rush-weaving on the one hand, and its transmission and the learning of new skills on the other, by comparing the situation before and after the establishment of the TREH. In terms of the different ways of considering knowledge of rush-weaving, as described above, the situation is whether or not a weaver will share her expertise with other weavers, while the knowledge of rush-weaving subsequently transformed from individual to collective knowledge. In terms of the ways in which knowledge is transmitted, the difference is in terms of how new skills and knowledge are learned. I suggest that, for beginners, the traditional ways in which rush-weaving skills were learned in Yuanli is very similar to the process described by Soumhya Venkatesan, in which there is no prescribed progression of tasks (2010: S168), and to Anna Odland Portisch's account in which there is no direct didactic instruction, but that the younger generation learns through 'unobtrusive observation' (2010: S67-8). Venkatesan studies the Labbai mat-weavers of Pattamadai town in South India, their learning, and their work of weaving, and shows that these weavers mostly learn mat-weaving by watching and imitating others. In her study of Kazakh women's everyday craft practice in the production of felt carpets in western Mongolia, Portisch discusses how younger generations learn their craft and how women continue to develop their craft skills throughout their lives. She describes how a Kazakh girl learned specialised techniques in craft production by watching her mother, by trying to carry out similar activities, and by developing her own ways of tackling difficult aspects of the craft.

Nevertheless, the ways in which rush-weaving skills are acquired in Yuanli has transformed from observation without instruction to learning from a class with explicit instruction. The former is the way in which every woman first learned weaving when they were young, whereas the latter is the way in which weavers learn what is new to them in order to improve their ability when they are already experienced producers. I believe the latter is largely engendered because of the appearance of the TREH. Although the TREH was certainly not the first to organise training classes for weavers in order to share their knowledge and skills, it has provided an opportunity for weavers to regularly exchange expertise. I will return to the issue of weavers' learning at the end of this chapter.

Apart from the different ways in which knowledge is transmitted, the characteristics of rush-woven objects differ according to the particular domain they may inhabit. In terms of the rush-weaving industry, the object is a commodity which is for sale. In terms of heritage, the object is an item that represents traditional craft and local culture, and it is for preservation. This transformation in the characteristics of the object has influenced people's perception of rush-woven objects, and there are differences of opinion in respect of this transformation. They are related to what I suggest are the two ways of thinking about rush-woven objects.

The two ways of thinking about rush-woven objects always coexist, but one line of thought has been reinforced since the establishment of the TREH. Most Yuanli people would not think of rush-woven objects as things to preserve, but rather as something to sell. As a retired merchant once said to me when I asked in an interview whether he kept anything to remember his career in the rush-weaving industry by, 'I sold objects, as many as possible. It is not necessary to keep something as remembrance.' For him, the aim was undoubtedly to sell all of the products in his shop until nothing was left.

The merchant's attitude largely corresponds to the situation of the weaver. It is understandable that the weaver makes objects to sell and earn money for everyday life. If she keeps one object, she has fewer products for sale and thus earns less. For the weaver whose life is not so difficult, there are other reasons that may cause her to have the same attitude. As my master weaver said to me when I asked her whether she ever felt reluctant to let go of the objects that she was proud of, 'No, I do not like to keep objects. I can always make another object when it is necessary. Besides, in so doing I get the opportunity to make a product that is even better.'

For residents, the rush-woven object is too familiar to collect. It is always available from the shops in the street, and many people can make them. There seems no reason to keep any rush-woven objects. I asked an informant, who collected many antique clocks and carved wooden items, whether he collected any rush-woven objects. He

did not, and he explained the reason to me by employing a Taiwanese saying, '*kin-bio- khi-sin* (one, who lives close to a temple, disregards the deity)'. In other words, Yuanli people would not necessarily collect rush-woven objects.

Apparently, for Yuanli people, objects are not for preserving, but for selling. Nonetheless, in my fieldwork there were some instances which differed slightly to the situations described above, and I suggest that these were due to, or encouraged by, the establishment of the TREH. The first example is a story I heard when I visited the TREH briefly in 2008. Chiong Siu-hong, who was eighty-four years old, went to the TREH in her son's company in 2007. She used to be a Yuanli resident but moved to live with her son in another location. On this day they returned to Yuanli because she wished to donate a rush-woven object to the TREH. It was a woman's clutch bag of extraordinary delicacy. Chiong Siu-hong's mother had made it, and Chiong Siu-hong had cherished the bag for over seventy years. Exhibited in the TREH, many more people would see it and appreciate it, and the object would become more valuable. Despite this, she gave her precious possession to the museum without asking for anything in return. Another example is that one or two of the many weavers I met occasionally made objects for their children and grandchildren. I knew that some weavers did this even before the appearance of the TREH, but I suggest that the difference lies in the fact that children now tend to appreciate rush-woven objects, whereas in the past they would not have. This transformation means that weavers will be more encouraged and willing to make objects for their families. Hence, the TREH has, to some extent, caused people to have different ideas in relation to the treatment of rush-woven objects and has reinforced the notion of preserving objects for posterity. However, in spite of these changes, people who think of collecting and preserving rush-woven objects are in the minority. Most people think preserving such objects is simply not necessary.

Being the revivalist or the tomb of rush-weaving: the anti-museum perspective

The disagreement over whether rush-woven objects were something to preserve or to sell, in my opinion, gave rise to the anti-museum position that some Yuanli people

had. Ia'p Bun-hui, the president of Shanjiao Community Development Association, whose contribution to the recent development of the rush-weaving industry has been described in Chapter Three, expressed his opinion of rush-weaving museums to me in an interview: 'I hope your thesis will not be the last research on Yuanli rush-weaving, after which rush-weaving disappears in Yuanli. The most crucial thing is to make people accept it⁷, rather than it ends up as something kept in the museum. That is pathetic.'

In fact Ia'p Bun-hui, in addition to the revival of the industry, was also concerned with the preservation of rush-weaving culture, but he did it by way of preserving and transmitting the skills and knowledge, rather than collecting objects. It is not ignored that local politics also plays a crucial role in people's perception of the TREH, but this is another issue beyond my ability to deal with in this thesis. My argument is that most Yuanli people, like Ia'p Bun-hui, regard rush-woven objects as something to sell rather than to preserve, and a museum as a place which functions as a tomb of culture where only old-fashioned and irrelevant articles are collected. In the opinion of most in Yuanli, the rush-weaving industry definitely has declined and therefore rush-woven objects are not as useful as in the past. Nevertheless the industry remains. But if the museum serves as the destination point for rush-woven objects, the TREH indeed represents the demise of the industry and rush-woven objects become antiques forever.

I found some similarity between what happened to the TREH and a particular Canadian museum. The dilemma related to the concerns the museum curator had regarding the preservation of cultural property. In particular, they related to loaning materials back to members of the First Nations in order that they may be used in dances and ceremonial events, with the potential risk of damage that this might bring (Clavir 2002). While her dilemma and my research are different to one another, there is some similarity in terms of the tensions concerned. That is, the controversy over the question of what is the best way of preserving what is valued – to preserve or to let it be used in the everyday context?

⁷ I think what he meant was that the priority should be to turn people into customers who want to use rush-woven products in their everyday lives.

The other related aspect is that the TREH has embodied the commercialisation and commoditisation of rush-weaving culture. As Sharon MacDonald (1997a: 173-174) argues, by drawing on Weiner's term of 'inalienable possessions', in terms of the commercialisation of culture and history in Gaelic revival projects occurring on the Isle of Skye, people's relation to objects is very different from that in commodity-exchange. That is, it involves 'the paradox of keeping-while-giving'. I suggest that the transformation from selling rush-woven objects to selling rush-weaving culture is very recent, and Yuanli people have not yet got used to it, or to the fact that the TREH sells both objects and culture.

In comparison to those who held an anti-museum attitude, weavers seemed to be friendly towards the TREH, having in general a more positive attitude. Some weavers returned to the industry after a period of absence, while some newcomers took weaving as a hobby and enjoyed the process of learning. The difference between weavers and anti-museum residents does not mean, I suggest, that weavers supported the museum wholeheartedly. The relationship between the museum and the weaver is what I now turn to.

The museum and the weaver

In this section, through the ethnography of two kinds of knowledge, I attempt to discuss the relative value of knowledge of different kinds in different social contexts. Roy Dilley (2004) examines three social contexts of the production and exchange of craft objects in Senegal. He uses several cases which focus on the relationship between the production and consumption of African craft and art objects to illustrate that the value of craft production and objects are subject to the context in which they are situated. For example, in the case of arts and crafts villages, the processes of hand-made craft production are designed to be visible to rich First World consumers. By contrast, at the street-vendors or the boutiques of antiques, the productive activities which have brought the objects on sale into being are invisible to the consumer so the sellers can give the impression that these products are 'genuine' or

‘authentic’ African traditional art (Dilley 2004: 803-6). Although my Yuanli example and Dilley’s African context differ in many ways, what I attempt to argue through this comparison is that the value of craft practices and objects is largely related to its context. In the Yuanli case, the value of different kinds of knowledge really depends on its context, that is, whether it is inside and outside the museum.

Two worlds, two kinds of knowledge – inside and outside of the showcase

During my fieldwork, I attended the training classes held by the TREH and by the Shanjiao community workroom. Most of the time, all of the trainees except me were experienced weavers. In several classes, I had two ‘classmates’, who used to be teachers in the school and had retired. In the training class, the situation was for them reversed, and they became the students. They were as clumsy as I was in weaving. When the master weaver sought to explain the steps required in making a pattern or an object, they were as helpless as I was. By contrast, other trainees, being experienced in weaving, could understand the master weaver’s instructions without difficulty. In the end, the three of us desperately needed instructions from our fellow trainees, who generously helped us step by step.

I found a very similar scenario in the DIY class provided by the TREH, for visitors. Usually, in the mid-point in a guided tour, visitors would observe a live demonstration by a weaver. After seeing the full exhibition, they would then attend the DIY class. By the time they arrived at the class, almost every visitor was tempted to have a try. Also, most visitors were confident that they could make a rush-woven object on their own, as from their observation of the weaver’s performance they thought it was easy to do. Once the class started, however, they found that the reality was quite different to what they had imagined, and most became frustrated within the first ten minutes. Despite the fact that the visitors would only hold five pieces of rush in their hands, they would fail utterly in their attempts to work the rush. By contrast, in the performance, the weaver would work with dozens of pieces of rush in her hands. Despite the huge difference in skill, the master weaver who was instructing the DIY class was able to teach step by step without losing her patience, and

eventually everyone was able to make a completed object. It is through this process that visitors were finally able to realise the difference between the weaver's ability and his or her own ability to control the rush and the movement of the fingers.

Being the centre of one world and at the margins of another

I have found that all of these – the DIY class, live performances, exhibitions, prizes, and the tourist's praise – have built a world inside the showcase. In this world, the weaver is always the main character. Her skill and knowledge of weaving make her superior, and therefore she instructs others in the proper way of weaving and is praised and valued because of her ingenuity. The standards by which people are distinguished in this world are based on the skill of weaving rather than anything else. But this is ultimately a world inside a showcase.

On leaving the showcase, the weaver enters another world. In this world, the weaver is always marginalised, and the standard of judgement is based on another set of values – literacy, educational background, occupation, income and so forth. In these two worlds there are two corresponding sets of knowledge: one is the knowledge of weaving and the other is knowledge other than weaving. Each is valuable in its own world.

The two retired teachers had certainly received a good education, relatively speaking, but seemed very clumsy when in class in front of the master weaver. However, returning to their ordinary lives, the two retired teachers treated rush-weaving as a mere hobby, while rush-weaving was the master weaver's way of living.

But sometimes the values and standards of the outside world permeate through to or impinge upon the world inside the showcase. For instance, when my master weaver considered whether or not she would participate in a weaving competition, it was eventually her educational background which prevented her from doing so. This was because she considered herself less experienced and knowledgeable in terms of wider society, and this would inevitably make her work inferior when compared to

other participants.

The outward appearances and contrasts between the two worlds further reveal and reinforce, rather than alter, the social and economic situation of the weaver. No matter how much a weaver is praised and valued, and thereby made to feel confident inside the showcase, her joyfulness and confidence cannot continue in the other world and she cannot ignore the fact that she is marginalised and limited. Hence, even though she acts as the principal protagonist in the museum, before long she falls back to a situation where she is aware of her illiteracy or poor educational background and her meagre earnings from tiring work. For the majority of her life, a weaver faces the latter situation, and at this time her joyfulness and confidence do not prevail.

The gap between the worlds inside and outside of the showcase is almost unbridgeable. As a result, it renders any praise or recognition bestowed on the weaver impractical or even unreal, as it shows how powerless the weaver is and how incapable the museum is to change the situation in the world outside the showcase. In the end, I argue, the world inside the showcase is little more than a magic world or fantasyland to most weavers.

The unchanged situation

Tan Hui-hun intended to change the situation from her position within TREH. She was the only buyer of rush-woven objects in the TREH. From her perspective as a Yuanli resident and a woman, she witnessed the price gap for decades and wanted to improve the situation for weavers. Thus, she mostly bought objects from weavers directly, rather than buying through middlemen. On this basis, the weaver could earn more. In addition, she tended to buy products for a price higher than normal (i.e. the price that the middleman, the trader and the shopkeeper of the hat-and-mat shop would offer), as far as was possible. However, Tan Hui-hun's well-intentioned efforts were frequently misunderstood. It was rumoured that, because she was a newcomer to the industry and knew nothing about what constituted a reasonable price, she was

cheated by the weavers when buying products from them. More importantly, her position meant she faced a dilemma: if Tan Hui-hun were to help the weavers, the profits of the TREH would decrease, which may in turn jeopardise its operation. If she, as an employee of the TREH, helped the organisation to earn as much as possible, it would mean exploiting the weavers in the same way that others do.

Also, Tan Hui-hun was the only staff member present at the TREH during the weekdays. Thus she usually went to the weavers' houses in the early morning to collect objects before the TREH opened, especially during the summer time when weavers were making more products. Otherwise, she went in the evening after the TREH closed at five. One day I went with her in the morning when she was going to collect objects from Tan Lim Giok-liu. Tan Hui-hun had ordered products from this weaver and the objects were ready. I estimated that the weaver was likely over seventy years of age. After we arrived at her house, we sat in the living room and she brought out about twenty women's hats from her room. Tan Hui-hun examined the quality and counted the hats, wrote the weaver's name and the price of the item on a receipt, and started to count out the money for the weaver. At that point, the weaver said to Tan Hui-hun, 'Can you please raise the price a bit? Recently everything has become much more expensive. The price of rush has risen to NT\$57'.⁸ Tan Hui-hun replied, 'I cannot. You do this to me every time when I come here'. The weaver did not give up and continued, 'Give me a little more so that I can buy things in the market'. Tan Hui-hun listened to the old woman and hesitated. I found that she was caught in a dilemma and was seriously considering the request and her position. In the end, without saying a word, she counted out an amount of money and gave it to the weaver – it was the price that the weaver had requested.

The weaver is not merely passive, but fights for herself in the process of negotiation. It is obvious in both the three sisters' dealings with Ong, and Tan Lim Giok-liu's dealings with Tan Hui-hun. In the negotiation, the merchant always decreases the

⁸ When I was doing fieldwork during 2005-2006, the price was NT\$50 per catty. I was told that the price had become NT\$54 in 2007, and it was around NT\$56 to NT\$57 in 2008, when the conversation took place. Catty is a unit of weight almost equal to a half kilogram. NT\$57 is about £1.1 (according to the exchange rate in January 2010, NT\$51 is equivalent to £1).

price whereas the weaver tries hard to raise the price as high as she can. But in the end it is the social fabric which causes the situation to remain unchanged.

Weavers and their practice of rush-weaving

Anna Odland Portisch, in her discussion of Kazakh women's craft practice, asserts that learning a skill often comes to inform the craftsman's experience of the world more generally, and such an enriched experience is implicated in continuing to learn and expand one's own craft practices (Portisch 2010: S76). Comparing Portisch's example of Kazakh women and my example of Yuanli women, although in the former situation the women make products for their own use whereas Yuanli weavers produce objects mainly for the market, what I found through working with Yuanli weavers is that most weavers live their lives in a state of continuous learning and knowledge acquisition of rush-weaving, which I shall explain in below.

If the transformation of rush-weaving into heritage is a recognition of the weaver that is relatively abstract to her, the establishment of the TREH is the embodiment of this abstract recognition. But the recognition is limited. The establishment of the museum, along with its preceding conditions, eventually created a world inside the showcase, where the situation is turned upside-down for weavers. Meanwhile, due to the emergence of the world inside the showcase, the division of the two worlds becomes clear. Further, it is the gap between the two worlds that makes the world created by the museum impractical and unreal. In the world outside the showcase, the weaver's situation is like the one described by Francesca Bray, 'simple peasant rice farmers are as marginal in contemporary Japan as hand-spinners are in India, but the small rice farm, like the *swadeshi* industry, lives on as a powerful symbol.' (1997: 23) Ironically, the museum needs the marginalised weaver to be its main protagonist in its operation. While the museum intends to preserve and value the skill-based knowledge of rush-weaving, it is exactly each and every weaver that makes the continuity of the knowledge possible. It is not doubted that the mission of a newly established museum is not to improve the economic and social situation of the weaver. However, it is the real world which weavers live in, the world of the rush-

weaving industry, rather than the world of heritage and the museum.

The establishment of the TREH engendered the further transformation of the characteristics of rush-woven objects, that is, a rush-woven object is possibly a commodity, an exhibited item in the museum, or a piece of work sent to a competition. No matter what the object becomes, though, for weavers, they are making objects either for the earnings or for the competition prize. Furthermore, from my observation of my master weaver's work, little changes in the production process, regardless of whether she is making a piece for a competition or simply as a commodity. I suggest her manner and standard of production is exactly the same – she perceives the changes of condition in her environment, treats the material carefully, and is always very serious throughout the process of production.

Weavers certainly have to react to the recent changes in the industry, including advantages and contradictions. For weavers, the establishment of the TREH is not entirely meaningless. For instance, the TREH has increased the sales of rush-woven products. Besides, the weaver also enjoys opportunities to learn and exchange knowledge of rush-weaving, and to participate in competitions or exhibitions, which are provided by the TREH. In the newly created relationship between the museum and rush-weaving, the most crucial point for the weaver is that the museum has increased opportunities for the weaver to continue her practice of weaving.

Nowadays, a weaver has to deal with the tensions which arise between keeping her unique expertise to herself, and sharing it with others. It is understandable that some weavers decided not to share, whereas other weavers shared and exchanged. For weavers who fearlessly shared their knowledge and techniques, they believed that even if their expertise became widespread, others would be unable to make her designs as well as she could. Because of this confidence, sharing knowledge is never a threat. Although a weaver might still feel uncomfortable if she found someone copying her products, her original work and ideas, she might also look on it as an opportunity to push herself to create new work.

Hence, it becomes evident that a weaver's skill-based knowledge is inevitably embedded in her practice of weaving. Both her knowledge and her practice are indispensable. Knowledge of the former without the latter, whatever the product, not to mention unique and innovative works, is useless.

While the relationship between the museum and weavers is newly established, the relationship between a weaver and her practice of weaving has not been changed because of the museum. Most Yuanli weavers, who still took rush-weaving as their livelihood when I met them, practiced weaving throughout their lives. In other words, weaving is their one and only occupation. As such, a weaver is well aware, better than anyone, of the decline of the rush-weaving industry over the past three decades, and that at present it is generally regarded as out-of-date and useless. Even though rush-weaving has been connected to heritage and the museum in recent years, and while they are delighted by the praise and prestige they receive, weavers never lose sight of their reality which, ultimately, will never match the fantasyland of the museum showcase.

Hence, a weaver keeps weaving for reasons other than the recognition and heritage status given by the museum. In fact, not every weaver chose to practice weaving initially. Rather, most people become weavers out of necessity, which is why rush-weaving became people's livelihood within certain historical contexts. The museum does not change the relationship between a weaver and weaving as her livelihood. Instead of being concerned with the museum, a weaver chooses to concentrate on her practice of weaving.

Even though becoming a weaver is not necessarily a matter of choice and her social and economic situation as a weaver is inferior, a weaver's life is neither miserable nor poor. A weaver may frequently bemoan her deficiencies, most often her illiteracy, and how much they might impede her progress in life, for example, my master weaver's reluctance to enter a competition due to her educational background. However, she does not feel sad for herself all the time. In contrast, she appreciates that rush-weaving as a livelihood brings her sufficient income and an independent

life. That is, owing to her income as a weaver, she need not rely on others for a living, and moreover, for example, she is capable of bringing up her grandchildren, when their parents are unable to look after them.

In this thesis I have illustrated the stories of a small group of women, whose ages ranged from fifty to eighty. The stories are related to the continuous practice of weaving in their lives. I argue that a weaver keeps weaving because, first of all, it is her lifelong and 'sole occupation' – in other words, many weavers thought weaving was their only choice of occupation, that is, the only job that they were capable of doing, although in reality this may not have been so. Throughout her life it is rush-weaving that provides her with a secure life, as the income she earns from making objects ensures her stability. Furthermore, weaving as her lifelong occupation has shaped her way of being. Secondly, rush-weaving is the kind of practice that is embedded in her environment. A weaver takes the natural plant that is available only in the local area, produces objects in response to the changes in weather conditions in the surroundings, and finally completes products that contain the characteristics of the locality (see Chapter Two). Also, because weaving is a choice of livelihood, she can live her life in Yuanli rather than searching for a way of life outside the town. Thirdly, being an artisan of rush-weaving has shaped her body and her mind. Hence, she is extremely sensitive to changes in weather conditions in the environment and the subtle movement of her fingers and her sense of touch always leads her thinking (see Chapter Two). Fourthly, rush-weaving connects all her experiences and emotions and is always related to her past (see Chapter Three). Fifthly, as long as someone buys her products, she lives her life independently. Sixthly, in the world of weaving, she is always capable of negotiating with others because of her skills and knowledge. Finally, she practices weaving in a way that is never forceful. She weaves diligently when there is work for her to complete. She never utters loud or aggressive appeals for the continuation of rush-weaving, as a revivalist might, even though rush-weaving is so meaningful to her throughout her life.

A weaver's life is a journey in the practice of rush-weaving. In this lengthy career, she reacts to various changes due to the transformation in each period of the industry.

In this process, her genuine ability lies in the fact that she retains her consistent manner of weaving (see Chapter Three), along with the variations that she is capable of making, and thereby she weaves continuously. I argue that a weaver's life interplays with the transformation of the rush-weaving industry. On the one hand, the transformation has an impact on the weaver and thus she needs to react, as is examined in this chapter. On the other hand, however, the weaver also influences the industry. The first example I have illustrated in Chapter One. Because many weavers decided to work in the factories, the merchants were unable to find enough products to meet their orders. Subsequently, the commerce between the merchant and his Japanese customer was changed. Another example being that, in the process of rush-weaving becoming heritage, some weavers chose to innovate whereas others insisted on the way of production that they had inherited from the past. Both sides have contributed to the current situation in the rush-weaving industry. Hence, I argue that a weaver's life is the embodiment of the process of transformation of the rush-weaving industry. Various relationships between the person and a certain historical period, and between the person and her environment, which are complicated and changeable, are all inscribed in the life of a weaver.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed the museum as an artefact existing in a particular social milieu and historical period, and found that the TREH is situated at the convergence of three contexts – the development of museums, the indigenisation movement, and the development of domestic tourism. The establishment of the TREH is directly caused by and an essential part of the state's nation-building project. Meanwhile, it is also a museum that accommodates the intangible and tangible heritage of rush-weaving.

The TREH is designed, in terms of the state's plan, to present the rush-weaving industry as culturally unique, in terms of place and way of life, and thereby engender a sense of belonging and sameness owing to the sharing of rush-weaving culture. While the TREH is expected, through its operation in local society, to forge identity,

it is a fact that the museum, as a contested terrain, witnesses and gives rise to more disputes over difference than the anticipated harmony of sameness.

Apart from forging identity, the TREH is also expected to revitalise the local economy by bridging the rush-weaving industry and the tourist industry. The TREH operation, I find, essentially concerns both the rush-weaving industry and the heritage of rush-weaving. In consequence, it engenders the changes and confrontations of the characteristics of the skill-based knowledge of rush-weaving and rush-woven objects, which further relates to the weaver's practice of weaving. The skill-based knowledge has transformed from individual knowledge to collective knowledge, and consequently the weaver faces the tension between keeping her expertise to herself for a secure career and life, and sharing it with others for the continuity of the industry and cultural transmission. The characteristics of rush-woven objects have changed from simply being a commodity in the domain of industry to various possibilities in the domain of heritage. In addition, the TREH has also reinforced the division between two kinds of opinions. While most Yuanli people think it unnecessary at all to preserve rush-woven objects due to the fact that the objects are for sale, a few people tend to collect objects for their posterity or donate precious objects to the museum, which is very possibly encouraged by the establishment and operation of the TREH. Regarding the rush-woven object simply as an article for sale, I suggest, leads to the articulation of anti-museum attitudes among some people. They consider the museum to be the tomb of their rush-weaving industry and culture, and are unwilling to countenance the museum, fearing it will lead to the demise of rush-weaving.

While the TREH seems to be very successful in its operation in relation to the rush-weaving industry and heritage, it in fact builds a world inside the showcase, where the situation is turned upside-down for weavers. However, the gap between the two worlds makes the world created by the museum impractical and unreal. Weavers do not treat the museum as a sacred place (*c.f.* MacDonald 2002, Bouquet 2001), that is, the TREH is neither a temple nor a forum (*c.f.* Cameron 1971). Rather, a weaver uses it as a community centre. The most crucial meaning for the weaver is that the

museum has expanded the opportunities for the weaver to continue her practice of weaving.

While the relationship between the museum and the weaver is newly established, the relationship between the weaver and her practice of weaving has not been changed because of the museum. Hence, the weaver keeps weaving because of reasons other than the recognition of the heritage status, or those made by the museum. A weaver's life is a journey in the practice of rush-weaving. In this lengthy career, she reacts to various changes due to the transformation in each period of the industry. In the end, weavers who keep making rush-woven objects in the same ways that they did in the past largely vitalize the operation of the museum.

Conclusion

Angkhi is not unlike other weavers. From the age of eight to eighty, she has made countless rush-woven products. Even though she is aging, her eyesight getting worse every year, her back muscles no longer strong, and though the price for her products is not even close to good, she continues to weave from day to day. These are the physical and working conditions for most weavers in Yuanli, and rush-weaving is their way of life. In this thesis I have talked about their stories and lives.

This thesis has focused on the production of a kind of handcraft called rush-weaving, which has been involved in the heritage and museum movement in rural Taiwan. I have explored the changing character of Yuanli rush-weaving as a livelihood, through which Yuanli people express themselves and interact with others. Rush-weaving production in Yuanli had developed historically from the making of objects for personal use in daily life, a peasant sideline, into a cottage industry. After becoming a cottage industry in the 1890s, rush-woven products have transformed from being mainly exports in the early period to becoming commodities for the domestic market afterwards, and have further transformed from commodities to heritage and museum collections over the past three decades. By investigating the role of heritage and the museum (as an idea and an organisation) in people's everyday life, I have illustrated how artisans make a living and live their lives, and the meaning of craft production in contemporary Taiwanese society.

I initially examined the economics of the rush-weaving industry as well as the transformation of the industry from the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945) onwards, in order to set out the context in which the research for this thesis was carried out. The weavers who I worked with from 2005 to 2006 ranged in age from their fifties to their eighties. Rush-weaving was very much a money-generating activity for households at the time when these weavers were young. No matter the generation, whether in the 1940s, '50s or '60s, a weaver would live a 'hand-to-mouth' existence when she first learned to practise her craft. However, her motivations for weaving may well have changed over the years, when comparing

why she originally took up weaving to why she continues to work as a weaver, as have the economics of the household. In addition, a type of weaver which did not exist before has appeared in the last decade. What they have in common is that they do not have to worry about the financial situation of the household, but simply enjoy of the practice of rush-weaving. Some treat rush-weaving as serious work, whereas others see it as a leisure activity.

In terms of the organisation of production in the rush-weaving industry, I focus particularly on the value of rush in relation to the value of time. I argue that how weavers perceive the rush represents the way in which they value their time; meanwhile, however, the time and effort that a weaver spends on a product is not equivalent to what she can earn from the product. Although weaving is the livelihood of these artisans and they only obtain limited earnings by weaving, they are not poor and their lives are not miserable. Despite the fact that most weavers are still making objects for a living and thus the earnings are very important in maintaining everyday life, they do not earn even close to subsistence level. Many weavers consider their earnings to be meagre at present, which I suggest is due to the fact that weaving as work does not bring in adequate income, that is, a weaver's earnings are never equivalent to her labour.

Regarding the major historical developments in the rush-weaving industry, although people made rush-woven objects prior to the Japanese colonial period, I suggest that colonial and cross-cultural encounter has shaped the characteristics of certain commodities (such as the Dajia Hat) and the industry, and that these characteristics remain a factor in contemporary production. However, these characteristics are not simply Japanese, but a mixture of Taiwanese, Japanese and Western elements. The Japanese colonisers were fond of rush-woven objects, which fitted in with Japanese tastes and Japanese perceptions of Taiwan, as well as the ideology of Japanese modernisation in the late nineteenth century. After the Japanese colonial period, from 1945 onwards, industrialisation and then global competition of labour force impacted on the industry, which led to a downward trend in the rush-weaving industry. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, there has been a revival in the practice of rush-

weaving.

I move on from the description of economic and social structure, to ethnographic details, and from explaining why weavers weave to how they weave and what is necessary in order to complete their work. I have examined the relationship between the characteristics of the material, the beauty of rush-woven products, and the value and virtue of weaving. In the context of craft production, it is the relationship between a weaver and her environment that matters. A rush-woven object is a commodity made mainly of natural material – rush. The particular qualities of the rush have determined the way in which rush-woven objects are produced and, in particular, that the method must always be handmade. Drawing on the perspective that suggests things can act upon persons (e.g. Gell 1998; Venkatesan 2009a, 2009b), I look at the interplay between the weaver and the material, that is, how the qualities of the material act on the weaver and the weaver acts on the qualities of the material.

Rush is chosen as the material for weaving not because it has certain social or symbolic meanings but because of its special characteristics, which contribute to the functions of the finished object. I have found that the study of the properties of materials (see Ingold 2000, 2007a, 2007b), rather than the notion of materiality (see Miller 2005, 2007; Tilley 2004, 2007), is an approach more suited to understanding what is going on in the process of rush-weaving. Because rush retains its natural state when it is used as a material for weaving, it is constantly changeable, responding to its surroundings. Therefore a weaver needs both a thorough understanding of the characteristics of rush and an unusual sensitivity in perceiving changes in weather conditions in their environment, and she combines the two in her practice of weaving. When starting to weave an object, it is the particular characteristics of rush that make a weaver treat the rush in a particular way, whereas the process of weaving is a series of actions through which the weaver changes the qualities of the rush in order to fit the different needs of each stage of weaving and thereby produce the desired object.

The beauty of the rush-woven object matters and the standards of beauty are achieved through the combination of a weaver's knowledge, skills, and personality. A

weaver integrates her knowledge and skills of weaving, but in fact her personality is the most crucial aspect. While the method of weaving is a common to all weavers, personality is individual and different (i.e. whether the weaver is scrupulous or careless). *Chhiu-lo*, i.e. the way of hand-making, refers to the personal skill (i.e. the ability to make objects to a particular standard) and style (e.g. neat or slightly messy) of the weaver. I suggest that *chhiu-lo* is the means to achieve the beauty of rush-woven objects, and it represents the weaver's efforts which lie behind the achievement of the standards of beauty. More importantly, it is the existence of a set of standards of beauty that distinguishes and determines whether or not a weaver's *chhiu-lo* is good, depending on whether she is able to make objects that can achieve these standards. I have shown that rush-weaving is a craft practice of 'embodied skills', in the way that the combination of body, mind, and environment is crucial to the production of objects.

The qualities of the material and the relationship between a weaver and her environment embedded in rush-weaving production remain the same in the present as in the past. What has changed over the past two decades is that rush-woven objects, which have long been commodities, have been transformed into objects of traditional craft and local culture because of their involvement in the heritage movement. I argue that Yuanli rush-weaving belongs to the intangible heritage of Taiwan, which is heritage embodied in people rather than in inanimate objects. In contemporary Taiwan, heritage is necessary for both the nation and its people due to particular postcolonial conditions. By illustrating the detailed political contexts of the heritage movement, I attempt to point out that, overall, rush-weaving as heritage is not so much related to the heritage industry in association with tourism, though this relationship is a fact, but is more connected to the complicated colonial history of Taiwan. This is, I believe, one of the particular characteristics of the Taiwanese case, and of interest for anthropological comparison.

The perception of rush-weaving as heritage was initiated by the state and taken up by the people of Yuanli. While some Yuanli people accepted rush-weaving as heritage, others did not. In becoming heritage, the history of rush-weaving is celebrated,

though the people of Yuanli had contradictory emotions towards the connection between the past and present of the rush-weaving industry. They felt a gap when comparing the past with the present, i.e. the joyful past and the sorrowful present. Remembering the heyday of the rush-weaving industry, they felt an intense concern for and gratitude toward rush-weaving. Thus, even those who were not weavers were upset by the current situation for weavers, their miserable working and economic conditions. Despite their disappointment in the decline of the industry, they wanted rush-weaving to continue, as they truly treasured the merits of rush-woven objects and the memories related to rush-weaving. It is these complicated emotions that make people constantly move between the past and the present, trapping them in contradictions or dilemmas. In the end, layers of the past of rush-weaving are revealed and rush-weaving as heritage is unsettled (*c.f.* MacDonald 2009).

In the process of becoming heritage, the contradiction between rush-weaving as heritage and as craft production emerges and ‘tradition versus innovation’ becomes an issue. If heritage is the celebration of the past, the ‘tradition’ of rush-weaving that a weaver inherits from the past is a subject to be celebrated. However, this same ‘tradition’ is, in the context of craft production, thought to be an obstacle to progress and the reason for the previous decline of the industry, in which case continuity becomes problematic. The ‘traditional’ weavers emphasise the methods of weaving which they have inherited, which is a commitment to the past. Conversely, the innovators and revivalists stress variation in the practice of weaving, which is a commitment to the present. My analyses of the contested relationship between tradition and innovation in rush-weaving largely coincides with what Ingold and Hallam (2007) argue, that the continuity of tradition is owing to its active regeneration in the tasks of carrying on rather than due to its passive inertia.

Rush-woven objects have not only transformed from commodities to heritage, but further have become museum collections. A newly built local museum, the Triangle Rush Exhibition Hall (TREH), accommodates the intangible heritage as well as the tangible artefacts of rush-weaving. As a museum exhibiting local culture, it gives importance to the everyday and to ordinary life. I have shown that, even though the

TREH has brought a new way of learning rush-weaving skills and knowledge, it does not change the relationship between the weaver and her practice of weaving, which at its core is the interrelationship of the weaver, the weaving material, and the environment.

I focus on the discussion of knowledge, and suggest that the particularities of the Yuanli case are about knowledge inside and outside the museum, as well as the different ways of in which knowledge is transmitted, before and after the emergence of the museum. In terms of the former, the division between weavers and non-weavers is not created but is reinforced by the establishment of the TREH. My analysis of the division between the two kinds of knowledge focuses on the relative value of knowledge of different kinds, in different social contexts. The value of craft practices and objects is largely related to context, and the value of different kinds of knowledge also depends on context, that is, whether inside or outside the museum. In terms of the different ways in which knowledge is transmitted, I believe that this is an issue for weavers with the advent of the TREH. Since the TREH not only preserves but also produces knowledge, the operation of the TREH leads to new ways in the transmission of knowledge. Different ways of transmitting knowledge now coexist since the establishment of the TREH, and a weaver needs to evaluate strategically the way in which she shares, or does not share, her knowledge with other weavers.

The way of learning rush-weaving in Yuanli has transformed from observation without instruction to learning in class with instruction. The former method is the way in which every woman first learned weaving when she was young, whereas the latter is the way in which weavers learn what is new to them in order to improve their ability when they are already experienced producers. I believe that the latter has largely been engendered by the TREH. Although the TREH was certainly not the first to organise training classes for weavers in order to share their knowledge and skills, it provides an opportunity for weavers to regularly exchange expertise.

What I found through working with Yuanli weavers is that, most weavers live their

lives continuously learning and developing their knowledge of rush-weaving. I argue that in contemporary Yuanli, rush-weaving is not good labour but is good work for these weavers. It is not good labour because it has low economic value; however, it is regarded as worthwhile work by most if not all weavers. It is good work not for the young women, who are instead encouraged to become school teachers or employees in business offices, where the money is better or the work activity deemed more worthwhile, but rather for these middle-aged and elderly women. In terms of the meaning of work (weaving) for these weavers, I argue that, in contrast to her 'useless' labour, being a weaver is being a 'useful' person. By 'useful', I mean that they can lead an independent life, make their own decisions, which means they can work, have leisure activities, meet friends, and enjoy life.

In this thesis, I explore the intersection of the craft practice of Yuanli rush-weaving as livelihood and the heritage movement in contemporary Taiwan. Drawing on ideas related to the properties of materials (Ingold 2000), I look into the process of craft production, and find that the interrelationship of a weaver, the materials she uses, and her environment, is most important. In addition, I examine the way in which the ideas of 'tradition', 'heritage', and the 'museum' are perceived and enacted in the everyday life of Yuanli people (*c.f.* MacDonald 1997a; Venkatesan 2009b), and find that 'heritage' and 'museums' are problematic concepts in the context of everyday life. I have shown how the skill-based knowledge required of weavers is embedded in the relationship between people and their environment, and that the tension between tradition and innovation, past and present, is embedded in the notion of heritage.

Nowadays, more and more museums are set up and more kinds of craft practice are regarded as heritage, whereas fewer and fewer people remain as artisans. Whilst craft production, artisans, and rural people are marginalised, heritage and the museum serve as tools for development by urban people. The notion of 'traditional craft' and 'tangible and intangible heritage', as well as the museum as an idea and an organisation, are more often than not considered from the perspective of the nation or the institution. However, the objects referred to are situated in the context of their

creation in everyday life. While rush-weaving as heritage creates a renewed market for rush-woven objects, it also gives rise to controversy over the continuity of rush-weaving. In terms of rush-weaving as intangible heritage, the skills and knowledge of rush-weaving remain in human hands and can only be passed down between persons who practice weaving. The value of rush-weaving, that which makes it worth saving for posterity, lies in the hands of elderly weavers and their unceasing practice of weaving. However, the weaver does not weave in order to pass down skills. Nor does she weave in order to forge local identity. What makes her weave is neither the status given by the heritage movement nor that created by the museum, but the relationship which she has with her practice of weaving, which is embedded in her everyday life and environment.

I argue that the weaver's life is the embodiment of the transformation of the rush-weaving industry. Various relationships exist between an individual and a particular historical context, and between the individual and her environment, which are complicated and changeable, and inscribed in the life of the weaver. Through working with Yuanli weavers, I have tried to find out why these women keep making rush-woven objects, how they actually practice their craft, and what is embedded in the process of production which is not always visible to outsiders. I examine why it seems to be the case that Yuanli weavers practise rush-weaving as an economic activity but do not simply treat it as a means of obtaining earnings. Why do these Yuanli weavers still choose to practise rush-weaving in the present day, when it is a declining livelihood with meagre income, or when they are not poor and are not even dependent on the earnings from rush-weaving, such as they are? Also, I attempt to understand the meaning of rush-weaving as work at a time when it is a declining livelihood, and at a point where the country is setting up more and more Science Parks, as well as facing post-industrial conditions. By examining the relationship between work, labour, value, and time, I found that these weavers continue their practice of weaving because rush-weaving is good work, though not good labour, for them.

I now return to the question that I asked at the beginning of this thesis – what is the

social logic behind the choice of the Yuanli weavers to continue the practice of rush-weaving? Given that they decided to continue making rush-woven objects, why do they have to be handmade? If it is due to the quality of the rush, which is not suitable for machine processing, why have merchants or weavers not simply replaced rush with another material more suited to machine-made products? I suggest that the weavers as well as merchants choose to work with rush most likely due to the particular characteristics of rush, which imbue with products made with certain merits. Following the French anthropologist Pierre Lemonnier's idea of 'technological choice', I argue that the social logic of Yuanli rush-weaving lies in the process of craft production. I found that the social logic of rush-weaving is changing. There used to be a saying: a good weaver, a good wife and a good mother. These terms were considered synonymous. However, it is not like that anymore. Instead, 'rush-weaving', 'old-fashioned and out-of-date', and 'traditional craft' are now synonymous. What I explore in this thesis is the social logic of the second set of synonyms. In this case, what makes a weaver keep weaving does not come from the outside world, but, I argue, lies in the relationship between the weaver and her hand-made objects. It is the process of weaving, and what is embedded in the process, as I have argued in this thesis, that make rush-weaving a challenging and worthy job to these artisans.

I believe this study of Yuanli rush-weaving will be of interest in the following areas of research. First of all, regarding the anthropological study of East Asia, as Charles Stafford points out, East Asian ethnography has so far had a surprisingly minor impact on anthropology in general. While it is striking that little comparative work has been done in East Asia by anthropologists, it can be argued that ethnography has tended to stress difference (Stafford 1998: 54-5). Although this research on Taiwan may address more difference than similarity, it provides material for future comparative work in East Asian anthropology.

Secondly, Taiwan is a small, rapidly changing society with the densest population in the world, the last nation in the world to be denied entry to the United Nations, and a country undergoing multiple layers of colonial rule (between native Taiwanese

people and foreign regimes, and between the majority ethnic groups and the minority indigenous people inside the country). All of these have made issues relating to heritage, tradition, and the past more intricate. For instance, the propaganda of the 'heritage' movement is very different in an old country like Britain and a young country like Taiwan, where it is uncertain whether the most recent colonisation has finished and whether the earlier nation-building project has continued. Hence, the notion and movement of heritage is both necessary and problematic in contemporary Taiwan. Also, any discussion of heritage in Taiwan cannot necessarily be related to the World Heritage affairs of the United Nations, since Taiwan presents a case unlike any other as it is not a member of the UN. In addition, the meaning of craft production, which is simultaneously an economic activity but also much more, is also very different in a country like Taiwan, which has experienced highly-developed economic industrialisation between the 1970s and 1990s, as one of the 'Four Asian Dragons', and has now entered its post-industrial stage.

This thesis, on the one hand, provides an ethnographic study on the relationship between artisans and their handmade objects, and between technology and society, and on the other hand, shows how the Taiwanese case can be of interest to scholars in the regional study of East Asia, as well as the anthropological study of skill-based knowledge, and heritage and museums, in various countries around the world.

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